

Foreword and Dedication

This is a collection of posts by world-renowned Jiu-Jitsu instructor John Danaher. Danaher is a student of Renzo Gracie and has taught many high-level martial arts practitioners, including GSP and Gary Tonon.

These social media posts capture Mr. Danaher's reflections on Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and martial arts in general. They demonstrate his vast understanding of combat and offer valuable insights as general wisdom for life and the path to success.

I collected these reflections because I believe they are too valuable to be lost. As a martial artist myself, I have been influenced by Mr. Danaher, though we have never met in person. I hope this work will further solidify Mr. Danaher's place as one of the greatest martial arts minds of our time. He embodies the martial spirit and wisdom that emerges in rare individuals throughout history—a teacher who belongs in any conversation about the greatest martial instructors.

I dedicate this work to him and to every martial artist who reads it.

Thank you, Mr. Danaher. May future generations celebrate you and benefit from the wisdom you have shared with us.

Zak
2024

Introduction

The greatest skill of them all - learning: Every jiu-jitsu athlete is in a constant quest to improve current skills and learn new ones as a means to performance improvement. However, there is one skill that stands above all other skills that one might acquire on the long road towards mastery - the skill of learning. Every day we have people telling us how to learn a given skill, a new move, a new concept. Yet it is rare to have someone tell us how to learn.

Learning how to learn is absolutely one of the keys to success in life in general and jiu-jitsu in particular. Most people take a very passive approach to learning. They learn from their teacher and practice when told to practice what they are told to practice. This is fine at the recreational level, but if you wish to go further, you must take a proactive approach to learning. This is a huge topic, but let us talk today about three key methods of learning that we can use to improve our understanding of the learning process so that we can make better progress.

The foundation of my coaching program is always **THE TRIAL AND ERROR METHOD**. This simple method of taking ideas and subjecting them to rigorous tests determines their value. We spend countless hours on the mat testing our theories and ideas through sparring and competition until we put provisional faith in them.

The second is the **GREAT PERSON METHOD**. I am a big believer in the idea of using great athletes in the sport to inspire and enlighten. If a given athlete is having tremendous success with a given move, that's a very clear sign that he is doing something right and important. By studying this, you are very likely to improve some aspect of your own game - even if your own method ends up being significantly different from the athlete you studied.

The third is **THE ORGANIC NATURE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT**. Skills are like life forms - they are born weak, naive, and vulnerable; but if nurtured and cared for, can grow eventually into something strong, confident, and capable. When you learn a skill, give it a chance to grow. Don't start using it on world champions. Start small and work your way up with it. In time, these three principles can transform your game.

Defence

May 23rd / 10:48 pm / 2016 - Ukemi

Ukemi is the skill of taking or receiving a throw or fall. It is a truly crucial combat skill that must be mastered for a simple reason—the most catastrophic injuries in the sport do not come from submission holds; they come from falling body weight landing in an unsafe fashion. The forces created by your entire body weight falling at speed onto the floor are far, far greater than even the best-applied submission hold. Numerous MMA, judo, and wrestling matches have ended immediately when a competitor tried to avoid conceding a takedown or throw by bracing out an arm—resulting in severe injuries so extreme that the match could not continue.

A good example is Shogun vs. Mark Coleman or Yoshida vs. Honorato at the 2000 Olympics. Remember, the first rule of combat is to avoid injuries that make eventual victory impossible. This is why ukemi, the skill of receiving falls safely, is primary among combat skills. It protects us from the worst form of injury in grappling—uncontrolled falling body weight—which has ended more careers and resulted in more hospital time than all the submission holds combined.

Not only is it a crucial physical skill to master, but it also has a key metaphorical element that teaches us about the nature of combat. It shows us that it is alright to be thrown down—as long as we can absorb it and recover, we can still achieve eventual victory. Ukemi demonstrates that real combat almost always involves an ebb and flow between periods where we are winning and losing. We must be able to recover from setbacks and continue to pursue the final victory.

Ukemi teaches us to concede a technique to the opponent and recover, allowing us to come back and fight again rather than refuse to concede anything and risk being broken and losing everything immediately. It recognizes that fights have a rhythm where sometimes we have the advantage, and sometimes the opponent does. What ultimately counts is the final outcome, not any single moment of the battle.

A good example of ukemi playing a vital role in a grappling match occurred when Garry Tonon took on the very powerful and dangerous Rousimar Palhares. Many people thought Mr. Tonon had lost his mind when he specifically requested this match, despite a massive size and strength disadvantage.

Mr. Palhares had developed a fearsome reputation as a leg-breaker and was among the best submission specialists in both MMA and grappling. However, it was not the leg locks that concerned me as I mapped out training preparation for Mr. Tonon. I was confident that Mr. Tonon possessed a more sophisticated leg lock arsenal than Mr. Palhares that would allow him to prevail, despite the size and strength imbalance, and enable him to dominate in leg submissions.

What concerned me most was the danger of heavy slams that could lead to a knockout or injury. Mr. Palhares had proven himself fully capable of effortlessly lifting and powerfully slamming even large MMA stars and grappling experts—Mr. Tonon was three weight divisions below him, so the risk of a catastrophic slam was

real. Accordingly, a significant part of fight camp focused on advanced ukemi training and how to use this skill to transition immediately back into submissions.

We trained diligently in the skill of over-rotating out of a slam at a speed higher than the slam itself to create immediate counter-attack opportunities. During the fight, Mr. Palhares demonstrated his extraordinary lifting ability on several occasions, including one major slam in particular. But Mr. Tonon was well-prepared—the subsequent big lifts allowed Mr. Tonon to use ukemi skills to roll faster than the lift itself, over-rotating back into attacks without taking damage. So, the most basic of skills, ukemi, proved vital in a clash between two of the most advanced submission grapplers in the world.

Offense

May 24th / 4:19 pm / 2016 - The Spirit of Relentless Attacks

In all of my teaching, I strive to convey the spirit of relentless attacks leading to submission. An interesting benefit of this approach is that as students' knowledge of attacks grows, so does their knowledge of how to defend them. The deeper and richer your knowledge of how to perform a given move, the more you understand about preventing your opponent from doing the same. Here, Eddie Cummings uses his depth of knowledge in leg locking to expertly position and hold his body, thwarting my attempt at a variation of a heel hook applied from cross ashi garami, while he patiently works his escape.

Attacking the Whole Body

A common misunderstanding of my approach to Jiu-Jitsu is that I emphasize leg attacks over others. This is probably due to the fact that I teach a very advanced system of leg attacks to my students, who compete in an environment where most opponents have a relatively primitive understanding of leg attacks—resulting in a disproportionate number of their victories via that method. In fact, I always encourage my students to adopt a theme of attacking the whole body in order to succeed with their favorite moves (tokui waza).

When it comes to submissions, we have three main choices: strangles, upper-body joint locks, and lower-body joint locks (there are a few others, but they are of much less importance). Any attempt to overemphasize one of these three options will inevitably create strong defensive reactions, ironically making it harder to break through at that intended target. A much better approach is to spread your attacks over the whole body with equal skill. The confusion and distraction created by a whole-body attack will open an opponent up far more successfully than predictable, localized attacks.

Thus, if I want a leg submission, I would be well-served to vociferously attack the neck and upper body and allow the resulting distraction and reaction to open the

door to the legs. Here, kohai student Ethan Crelinsten demonstrates excellent dispersal of attacks in a recent local tournament. He attacks with great determination using armlocks (juji gatame), strangles (triangle/sankaku), and leg attacks (ashi garami). This barrage of attacks leaves a confused opponent open to a finish via a sankaku/juji combination—a fine example of dispersed attacks creating openings for a favorite technique (tokui waza).

Chasing After the Wind

There is an old cliché in boxing: Don't try to force a knockout. Those who do so almost always end up disappointed and, quite often, as the victim of the very outcome they sought. The same is true in jiu-jitsu. Chasing directly after submissions feels like chasing after the wind; those who do so usually fail to get what they wanted so badly. Rather than chase submissions directly—CHASE THE PRECONDITIONS THAT MAKE SUBMISSIONS MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR. Once those preconditions are attained—THE SUBMISSIONS WILL COME.

So often, I see students embrace our program's emphasis on submissions but falter badly when they race directly toward them. Their game takes on a scrappy and forced quality that yields meager results. A much better approach is always to ask yourself: WHAT ARE THE PREREQUISITES OF SUBMISSION? and FOCUS ON ATTAINING THOSE.

Traditionally, jiu-jitsu has taught that POSITION is the prerequisite for submission. There is much truth to this. However, our approach to jiu-jitsu adds additional prerequisites to the traditional focus on position. A deep study of this area will be of immeasurable value to your submission percentages. Here, kohai student Oliver Taza shows excellent preparatory skills in setting up a submission during a recent tournament.

High percentage submission holds:

Our approach to jiu-jitsu centers around the idea of **CONTROL THAT LEADS TO SUBMISSION**. Accordingly, a large part of our training time is invested in perfecting the mechanical details of the highest-percentage submission holds. People are often surprised to learn that I only teach around 15-20 families of submission holds. These are the most successful types of holds in high-level competition across all weight categories and belt levels. There are only so many ways the human body can be broken or strangled by another body, and among those, we find around fifteen to twenty types of hold that are truly effective in competition.

There are innumerable other holds, but I don't believe the meager results gained from them justify the amount of training time required to perfect their use. Instead, we focus all our attention on those with a high probability of success. You'll notice that I said "families" of submission holds—thus, the American lock (ude garame) is one such family. Within that single family, there are many variations, setups, etc., so fifteen to twenty families of submissions represent an enormous amount of study. Among them, you will find all the families seen in every grappling event: juji gatame armlocks, kimura, knee bars, figure-four toe holds, etc.

A big part of my job as the coach of this program is to deepen my students' knowledge of these essential families of submission holds and then embed them in coherent systems that enable a student to apply them against strong resistance. Then, their knowledge of the mechanics of the move will create the kind of pressure that forces a submission, even against a very determined foe. Here, fifteen-year-old Nicky Ryan gives Eddie Bravo, maestro of his own system—the rubber guard—a close view of one of his favorite high-percentage submissions, the heel hook. He uses our ashi garami system to work into a variation of the move and secure victory in a recent superfight.

Combination Attacks:

In an ideal world, all of our submission attempts would succeed on the first try. Unfortunately, the world rarely cooperates with our desires. Most of the time, our opponent's anticipation and resistance, combined with imperfections in our technique, result in the failure of the first attempt to secure a submission. This is where combination attacks come in.

Combinations allow us to break through resistance and defense via a second, third, or fourth attack that complements the initial attack in some way. Hopefully, this will take advantage of those defensive reactions and break through the resistance. The notion of combination attacks becomes more and more important as you climb in skill level, as your opponent's ability to read and foresee the setups to attacks increases.

I find that students quickly learn to appreciate the value of combination attacks and work hard to incorporate them into their game. But then a new problem emerges—the problem of **COMPLACENT ATTACKS**. Students start thinking that since the real attack will be the third or fourth attack, they might as well put little or no effort into the initial submission attempt that begins the combination.

This is a crucial failure. A good opponent will simply not feel threatened by the initial attack and will either not react in the way needed to set up the subsequent attacks, or worse, launch into their own counterattack off your weak attack. It is critical that the first move be **A GENUINE THREAT**. Only then will you get the kind of reactions needed to drive the combination forward to success on the second, third, or fourth move. That is why it is good for students to have several very strong and threatening moves that opponents know and fear.

Faking these moves will always elicit strong and predictable defensive reactions that can be exploited via combination attacks. If there is no plausible threat at the onset, the subsequent moves are unlikely to be any more threatening. Here, I work on leg attack drill combinations with Ms. Ottavia Bourdain, looking to create predictable reactions off an initial attack that has to be taken seriously, setting up a chain of events that will lead to a submission.

Connection and body geometry:

A critical part of grappling is the ability to create a solid sense of connection between our body and that of our opponent. **Separation** is the death of effective application of nearly all grappling techniques. Most beginners use strength as the primary means of building that tight connection, and as a result, they quickly fatigue and become ineffective. A much better approach is to consciously **SEEK TO FIT THE GEOMETRY OF YOUR BODY INTO THE GEOMETRY OF YOUR OPPONENT'S BODY.**

There must be a precise fit of your body into that of your opponent throughout the relevant areas that are in contact. This immediately creates a connection that can be maintained against strong resistance with minimal strength. The only way this fitting of your body into his can be achieved is if your body is sufficiently relaxed and supple, allowing you to fill the spaces in the same way liquid fills the inside of any vessel into which it is poured, regardless of shape.

Only when that precise fit has been achieved is tension applied and the submission attempted. The feeling here is one of a key precisely fitting into a lock—only then can the doorway to submission be entered. Developing this sense of relaxed fitting-in of your body's geometry into that of your opponent, followed by the isometric tension required for breaking, is a huge part of the development from beginner to expert. Here, my student Shy Ace shows fine form as his ashi garami fits precisely into the geometry of his much larger opponent's legs and hips, creating a powerful submission win in a recent local tournament.

The principle of localized force:

The central feature of jiu jitsu is to use mechanical advantage to control greater strength and aggression with less. How is this possible? It is done largely through the principle of localized force. Let's say we have an opponent who can apply an average of one hundred units of strength in standard strength tests, while we can only generate 50 units of strength. As a whole, he is roughly twice as strong as us overall. How is victory through grappling possible in such a case?

The key is to understand that it is possible to use a very high percentage of our overall strength to attack a small percentage of our opponent's overall strength at a point of his body which, if attacked successfully, will end his ability to continue the fight. If I can use the various movements of jiu jitsu to maneuver into a position where I can create a temporary **LOCAL** strength advantage at a critical point of my opponent's body (neck or joints), I can overcome an **OVERALL** strength disadvantage.

The whole basis of our sport is precisely to develop the skill of maneuvering into these local advantages as efficiently as possible and using that to create a threat to a critical but vulnerable body part in a way that leads to submission. A good example would be ashi garami, where a very high percentage of our overall strength—both legs, both hips, back, and both arms—are used to restrain an opponent's single leg and hip in a way that allows us to threaten severe damage.

If a good ashi garami allows us to use 90% of our 50 units of strength against an opponent's single leg, 33% of his 100 units of strength, then we shall have a considerable local strength advantage on an opponent who is twice as strong as ourselves overall. This is one of the core principles of our sport and one which we must constantly keep in mind as we train and develop.

Here, Gordon Ryan uses a high percentage of his total strength on the isolated leg of his opponent through a variation of ashi garami, creating a local advantage long enough to threaten a break and get a submission on his way to victory at EBI 8.

The indirect path:

We work in a sport where we are actively trying to defeat someone who is actively trying to defeat us. This almost always creates a mindset in both athletes to go as fast and directly as possible to their respective goals. The problem is that both athletes usually have a good idea of what the goals of the other are. As a result, we run into a wall of defense and get shut out.

Often, you will get much better results if you employ an indirect path to your objectives. Here is a general rule which I work hard to instill in all my students: the law of direction. The more sophisticated and knowledgeable your opponent, the more you will be required to choose the indirect route to your real objectives. The less sophisticated and knowledgeable your opponent, the simpler and more direct your attacks should be.

Only when your real intent is masked behind fakery and deception will you pass through the defenses of an astute opponent. Now, reading and saying this is easy, but performing in this manner while being vigorously attacked by a dangerous opponent is quite another. Very few people ever achieve the nerve, subtlety, and patience to carry it out in a combative situation.

If you can, however, the rewards can be tremendous, as creating confusion and misdirection will make it far easier to execute your favorite moves in the heat of competition. Of all my students, none surpassed the subtlety, patience, and indirectness of Georges St-Pierre in the setups to his favorite move—the double leg takedown. People usually remember and admire his strong driving finish to the double leg. Very few ever comprehended the subtle, indirect setups that enabled him to get to that move on all comers for over a decade. Here, Mr. St-Pierre gives

one of his strongest rivals, Josh Koscheck, multi-time NCAA wrestling champion, some serious air time in the second match in Montreal.

All or Nothing:

An interesting element of jiu jitsu and of submission holds in particular is their all-or-nothing character. They either work 100% and end the match, or they don't work at all. If you show me a man who knows 95% of what is required to complete a jujigatame arm lock, I will show you a man who has never submitted anyone with that move. As such, there is, perhaps more than in any other aspect of our sport, a need for exactitude and precision.

There is nothing more heartbreaking than getting very close to a submission and then losing it in the last stage. Not only is it psychologically damaging, but it is also usually physically exhausting, as most submission holds require considerable amounts of isometric strength to execute. Students have to learn through experience to walk a fine line between working hard to successfully finish a submission versus abandoning one to save energy and switch to another option.

We are engaged in a sport where a failed submission has no more worth than a punch that missed. As such, our execution must be perfect down to the smallest details or, if not, it must be followed by another movement that justifies the energy expenditure of the first submission attempt. Nowhere else in our sport is greater knowledge and precision required in the placement of fulcrum and lever—small mistakes can have deep consequences here.

At the ADCC World Championships, Garry Tonon took the attack to his much larger rival, Vinny Magalhães, an extremely talented ADCC champion, in the open weight division. The expression on Mr. Magalhães' face shows that he is close, but despite several determined attempts, he was ultimately unsuccessful. It takes great self-belief to choose the path of submission—failure almost guarantees losing in points-based tournaments, but success brings the deepest feelings of satisfaction our sport offers.

Improvising:

Most of our training drills and principles involve learning precise algorithms of movement that take our opponent in predictable directions, so that we can follow his defensive options all the way through to submission. As such, there is a lot of rote learning, memorization, repetition, etc.

It is an undeniable fact, however, that in sparring and competition, situations commonly arise that are outside our normal drilling and training experience, and we are forced to improvise as the situation unfolds.

It is also undeniable that some people seem to improvise better than others. The question thus becomes:

HOW DO THEY DO SUCH A GOOD JOB OF IMPROVISATION?

I believe that the most important reason for the disparity in the ability to improvise is the mental process that different athletes carry into the bout. Most people focus on the details of their algorithms. As long as the action stays within the boundaries of those algorithms, they do very well.

This mindset, however, does not cope well with unforeseen circumstances, as it does not have a precise, well-learned algorithm to cover it. Other athletes focus more on the big picture of **WHAT THEY ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH** at any given moment, rather than **THE PRE-LEARNED DETAILS OF EXACTLY HOW THEY ARE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH IT**.

As such, they can take situations that are unfolding in ways they did not foresee or want, identify the end result they want, and find an improvised path toward it.

A fine example of this occurred when Garry Tonon won the EBI 9 event.

Mr. Tonon was by far the smallest competitor and entered with only three days' notice. He battled to the final where he met world champion Vinny Magalhães, a man far larger than himself. Our usual back control protocols were severely challenged by the size difference.

Mr. Tonon immediately switched his mindset from the usual routines to the overall desiderata—maintaining spinal alignment long enough to create time pressure that would hopefully set up a submission opportunity. He switched between a cluster of unorthodox grips and movements that saw him win a thrilling victory on riding time against his great rival.

Submission Holds:

The various submission holds are the most distinctive and revered element of jiu jitsu—a fact revealed by the point system of the sport. You can be losing a match by any number of points, but if you are able to lock in a successful submission hold, the match is yours. No other part of the sport is valued so highly. Each of the submissions has its own unique character, which helps explain why so many jiu jitsu players are very good at some, yet surprisingly weak with others. Gaining deep knowledge of the nature and application of each of the main submission holds is a huge part of your ultimate progress in the sport. Like a large and disparate family, they are all related, yet quite different from each other.

Among the main joint locks, the most basic distinction is between the **linear locks** and the **twisting locks**. Here, I demonstrate a fairly standard variation of **ude garami**, commonly known as the "Kimura" in BJJ parlance. This belongs in the

category of twisting locks and is among the most important and effective of the upper body submissions. One of its great hallmarks is its versatility; it is equally useful in gi or no-gi, in both standing and ground grappling, from either top or bottom positions, as both a means of submission and as a means of control. It can serve as either an end in itself or as a lead into other techniques.

Jiu jitsu is largely bound up with the skill of creating some form of preliminary advantage before launching an attack. One of the most important forms of advantage is **balance breaking**, or **kuzushi**. Kano showed his genius by making this the centerpiece of his Judo program in standing throws—but the concept is just as valuable in ground grappling.

At the higher levels of the sport, the ability to break through tough defenses is essential to success. Generating kuzushi is one of the best preambles to attacks—without it, there is little chance of an attack succeeding and a high risk of a strong counter. Here, I test the balance of Eddie Cummings as a prelude to a more serious attack.

Position Before Submission:

Jiu jitsu students often use this phrase—some even go so far as to define the sport this way. It is a good way to express a valuable insight to a beginner, but at the higher levels, it is an oversimplification.

Positional dominance is one form of control and advantage, but it is only one among many forms of advantage. Indeed, such is the subtlety of the sport at the international level that it is quite possible to give up to your opponent one form of advantage while retaining several different forms for yourself. In this way, weakness can be feigned from a position of strength, and an unwary opponent can be taken by surprise by an unforeseen attack.

Here, Garry Tonon gives away positional advantage to the very talented Jake Shields while hunting for other forms of advantage to launch attacks.

The Story of The Sniper:

Part of the pleasure of teaching at a major academy in NYC is the breadth of people who pass through for instruction in the kingly art of jiu jitsu. They come from all walks of life and every corner of the globe. One who left an impression upon me, which I found useful for students of jiu jitsu, was an American sniper who had recently returned from active duty. After training, we talked about his work. I've always had an interest in weaponry, so we compared his craft to his interest in jiu jitsu.

At one point, he turned to me and said, "John, my world is a world of uncertainty. I can't guarantee that I will get into a good position to hit my target. I might get seen before I get there. My target may not be where I anticipated. The course of battle might interrupt my plans in ways I never even foresaw. But I do have one certainty. IF YOU GET ME TO A SECURE HIDEOUT WITHIN ONE THOUSAND METERS OF MY TARGET, it doesn't matter whether it's day or night, rain or sunshine, warm or snow — THAT MAN IS A DEAD MAN — THAT MUCH IS CERTAIN."

We were silent for a moment as we reflected upon his words. Then we both smiled as we recognized, at the same time, that **exactly the same sentiment is true in jiu jitsu**. Fights are uncertain affairs. We can't guarantee that we will get into a good position to lock in a submission. We might get knocked out before we get there. We may struggle to take the opponent to the ground and keep him there.

But **IF** we get him into a well-locked breaking or strangulation position, **OUR MECHANICS OUGHT TO BE SO WELL TRAINED AND REHEARSED** that, like the sniper, we do not see failure as a possibility. All jiu jitsu athletes can benefit from this mindset. Research and rehearse your finishing mechanics to the point where you know that, if the opportunity to lock in a tight submission arises in the whirling chaos of a fight, the fight is yours.

We can't be confident about everything in combat, but **that** is something that every jiu jitsu fighter worth his salt must know and believe.

May 23rd/ 5.20pm/ 2016 - Training Pace

Most jiu jitsu students train at the same pace consistently and often without a clear goal for each specific session. It is important to learn to work at different speeds and match the intensity to the objectives of that training session.

Very often, technical progress is optimized by working on particular skills at a slower speed. On the other hand, if the goal is preparation for a competitive match, then intensity levels must be raised to mirror those expected during actual competition.

Here, Ms. Ottavia Bourdain and I engage in skill development with various ashi garami techniques, working at a controlled pace to refine the technique.

May 24th/ 4.19pm/ 2016 - Time, Planning and Discipline

...time, planning and discipline- put them together and watch what seemed impossible Happen.

May 24th/ 10.18pm/ 2016 - The Value of Feedback

The Value of Feedback: Progress in jiu jitsu mirrors progress in science—it comes from experimental trial and error over time. Feedback from these trials and errors leads to a new set of theories, which are then subjected to rigorous testing and improvement based on failures, problems, and successes. Over time, remarkable progress can be made.

Gordon Ryan discusses feedback with me after training, specifically regarding our back attack system, which proved so effective for him at EBI 6. On his way to winning the championship, three of his opponents were defeated from the back position (the other via our leg lock system). In this session, we propose modifications and improvements to the system based on his valuable feedback.

May 25th/ 6.59pm/ 2016 - Pre-Contest Warm Ups

Getting an Athlete Ready for Competition:

Preparing an athlete for competition is a long and deliberate process. In reality, the outcome of the match is decided long before the actual day of competition, shaped by the preparation of the two contestants. The match itself often feels like a postscript to everything that has already transpired in the dojo, during pre-fight strategizing, and in the quiet moments of reflection and forethought that the combatants experience before the bout.

Here, I assist Eddie Cummings in his final preparations for a match as he runs through last-minute drills with Garry Tonon, just before stepping onto the stage where all of that hard work and preparation will be tested.

May 26th/ 6.29pm/ 2016 - New Training Partners

Training with new partners can be a valuable aspect of contest preparation, as it simulates many of the elements involved in competing against someone you've never grappled with before—someone who comes from a training background very different from your own. This type of practice challenges you to adapt and improvise under stress, much like the adaptability required to succeed in competition.

May 26th/ 6.51pm/ 2016 - Loneliness is a Crowded Room

Match Time:

Eddie Cummings goes through our final pre-match preparations as he is about to go on stage. In the end, in a crowded arena, coming from a crowded gym and a crowded corner of coaches and teammates—the athlete goes out alone. Learning to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your own mind in these crucial moments is a large factor in your success or failure. As a coach, I must be sensitive to the individuality of the athlete in these moments—each one must find their own way of coping. What works for Eddie Cummings will not work for Garry Tonon or Gordon Ryan. Many a man has melted in these last moments and found their stage performance fell far below their gym performance—finding a routine to prevent this is one of the most deeply personal and difficult aspects of professional grappling and fighting.

Many Will Look, But Few Will See:

In all things, but especially in jiu jitsu, small details, often unseen or ignored, make the difference between success and failure. Cultivating a habitual reaching for perfection in performance, however difficult and frustrating that might be, is thus crucial to your advancement. This is so often a game of inches and millimeters and the consequences of even the smallest mechanical or tactical mistakes can be very costly indeed. I tell you in all honesty that it will be excellence in the performance of the unexciting, mundane aspects of jiu jitsu—not the pursuit of the exotic and showy elements—that will enable you to prevail when you need them most. Here I go over the minutiae of rear strangles with young Nicky Ryan and the ever-observant and thus constantly improving, Eddie Cummings.

The Essence of Jiu Jitsu:

The ability to control greater size, strength, and aggression with lesser size, strength, and aggression: One of the defining characteristics of jiu jitsu and indeed, all the combat sports, is the ability to control and overcome greater size, strength, and aggression with less. It is the quintessentially human action of using the ingenuity of our conscious minds to make up for the deficiencies of our body. Jiu jitsu is one of the few remaining combat sports that still permits open weight bouts where this essential feature can be tested.

The finest example in recent memory was the clash between Garry Tonon and Rousimar Palhares—a man who was the very symbol of size, strength, and aggression in our sport and who was in addition, highly skilled in submissions, particularly leg locks. Yet it was the much smaller, weaker, and less psychologically aggressive Garry Tonon who dominated most of the action—winning all the submission exchanges in a thrilling encounter of psychological aggression versus tactical aggression that went the distance. It was a superb example of the essential nature of the kingly art of jiu jitsu.

From Rivalry to Friendship:

The Nature of Our Sport:

The very nature of our sport is centered around competition and the ability to gain and enforce competitive advantage over an opponent. One of its greatest pleasures, however, comes from the realization that, however strong the fervor of competition might be, in the end, the sport as a whole is bigger than any temporary rivalry between ourselves and another person—for we are all ultimately united by the kingly arts of combat.

The Reminder of Friendship and Camaraderie:

Years ago, my student Georges St-Pierre was matched to fight the formidable Jake Shields, who at that time had not lost a fight in almost eight years and had crushed numerous UFC champions and contenders along the way to his title fight. The fight and the camp leading to it were as tightly contested as any, yet years later, Mr. Shields came by to train and work on skills. It was a valuable reminder to me that friendship and camaraderie are more uplifting and lasting than rivalry and advantage.

The Importance of Humanity Over Skill:

In the end, it is far more important to be a good human being than it is to be a good fighter. Skills in a competitive world and the great achievements they can bring us make us stand out from the crowd, but it is our humanity and empathy that bring us back. Jake and I share some stories from old campaigns after another tough session with the team.

Skepticism and Leg Locks:

The Value of Skepticism:

One of the most valuable traits a person can have is a healthy sense of skepticism. The skeptical mindset is one of the pillars of the scientific method; all proposed theories are treated with skepticism until sufficient verification is accumulated before the scientific community will provisionally accept it as confirmed.

The Downfall of Traditional Martial Arts:

One of the downfalls of many traditional martial arts was the lack of a proving ground through open competition and a resultant lack of skepticism. This lack of skepticism allowed for increasingly outlandish theories and doctrines that veered far from reality and robbed them of effectiveness.

The Leg Lock System:

I had, from an early stage of my training, been interested in the value of leg locks as a means of victory in jiu jitsu and MMA. I worked diligently on building a system of attacking the legs which would overcome many of the complaints often voiced against the use of leg locks.

From Public Recognition to Grappling Success:

During this time, I was mostly known to the public through the exploits of MMA fighters such as Georges St-Pierre and Chris Weidman. None of my grappling students chose to compete during those years, so my pure grappling style was largely unknown to the public. That all changed when Garry Tonon, Eddie Cummings, and Gordon Ryan asked me to coach them for grappling competition.

One of my first actions was to train them extensively in my system of leg attacks, as I believed this would afford them a considerable advantage over their opponents in competition.

Building Success from Local Level to Global Recognition:

Working initially at the local level and building from there, they quickly experienced tremendous success and brought back valuable data for further improvements to our system. As their success grew, they were elevated to higher levels of competition, and their fame grew, along with the notoriety of their leg locks.

At this stage, an impasse was reached—now people knew of the system and its effectiveness. The question became: was it up to the level of the most esteemed leg lock experts in the world?

Facing the Experts:

It was then that I assembled the squad and launched an ambitious plan to overcome public skepticism by systematically fighting and defeating the most renowned leg lock experts in MMA/Grappling. The four names on our list were:

1. **Masakazu Imanari**, the feared and revered leg lock master from Japan, called the 10th-degree leg lock master by his fans.
 2. **Reilly Bodycomb**, an American practitioner of the Russian art of Sambo, who had garnered a reputation for deep technical knowledge of the leg lock game.
 3. **Marcin Held**, who had used leg locks to win many victories in MMA and emerge as a champion.
 4. **Rousimar Palhares**, the massively strong and ferocious Brazilian, the only man in UFC history to be banned from the sport for being too violent, and probably the most feared grappler in modern history.
-

Defeating the Experts:

Analysis of the four convinced me that the squad would prevail against the first three. Events proved me correct, as Garry Tonon and Eddie Cummings quickly and easily defeated all three via leg lock. People were shocked to see the greatest leg lockers being themselves leg locked by young students who had only been using this system for less than four years.

The Final Challenge:

The greatest trial was the last. Mr. Palhares, in my opinion, was easily the best man on our list both technically and physically. Moreover, he had a mystique and competitiveness that elevated him further still. Deep analysis of his game revealed that he was extremely good at enforcing the simple algorithm of his style on most

opponents but lacked the ability to change algorithms when the initial one was interfered with.

Thus, I was confident that Mr. Tonon would prevail in a leg lock battle despite the huge size and strength discrepancy. Here, you can see Garry Tonon putting Mr. Palhares under extreme pressure with a perfect inverted heel hook, forcing a wild turning escape out of bounds.

Most people in the arena that night were utterly shocked to see Mr. Palhares repeatedly forced to extricate himself from his own signature move. The crowd gasped as they saw what seemed impossible—the world's most renowned leg locker being attacked at every opportunity via leg lock by a young man half his size and strength.

When the match came to an end by draw, both men remarked on the skill and tenacity of the other in a tremendous show of respect. That night in England, many skeptics walked into the arena to watch this match; when it was all over, very few walked out.

Empirical Tests:

Nothing furnishes proof of a theory or set of beliefs quite like a simple yet decisive empirical test. Jiu jitsu often allows for very decisive tests due to the nature of submissions. This often makes way for a very clear testing of the pros and cons of a given system versus alternative systems. Here Eddie Cummings quickly latches on to the leg of noted leg lock practitioner Reilly Bodycomb and secures a decisive win - validating the effectiveness of our system in a very clear empirical test.

The Two Faces of Jiu Jitsu:

Every aspect of jiu jitsu has two sides—a positive side, where my intention is to enforce my game upon my opponent, and a negative side, where I attempt to prevent my opponent from doing the same to me.

For example, in a grip fighting exchange, I try to impose my grips upon my opponent, while simultaneously negating his attempts to impose his grips upon me. When I pin someone and look to transition from one pin to another, I aim to position and hold myself in a way that maximizes my ability to move freely around my opponent, while at the same time doing my utmost to inhibit movement in my opponent.

This dual nature—enhancing my aims while undercutting and negating those of my opponent—is a key element of victory. Note that one without the other is without value. If I only care to impose my game without shutting down my opponent's, he can move as freely as I do, and the result will be uncontrolled scrambles leading nowhere. If I only seek to negate what my opponent does, without any positive

movement or attacks of my own, I will never amount to anything more than an annoyance to my opponent—slowing him down without ever actually presenting any danger to him.

Here, Eddie Cummings exhibits a fine example of this duality. He has attained a position where he can readily move his body in the appropriate directions to apply crushing force to the leg of 10th Planet black belt champion Nathan Orchard, while at the same time completely eliminating Mr. Orchard's ability to move in a way that would allow escape. This creates a huge imbalance in movement potential, leading to decisive victory

Solo Movement Drills:

Some of the most impressive training lessons I learned came from watching great boxers go through their solo movement training—shadow boxing. They approached this part of their training with great seriousness. Indeed, it occupied a considerable part of their overall workout and was done with a commitment and sense of purpose that was deeply impressive to me.

This stands in stark contrast to the rather lazy fashion in which most grapplers approach solo drills. Usually, they are done in a very perfunctory way prior to partner drills as a warm-up. There is none of the mindfulness, sense of technical perfection, and most importantly, relevance to actual sparring that was so evident in the shadow boxing of the great pugilists.

This experience led me to develop grappling solo drills designed to improve movement in ways that would make a difference in live training, just as quality shadow boxing improves the sparring of good boxers. Time invested in this project will serve you well—it will give you so much more than just a warm-up. It will deepen your understanding of efficient movement in newaza (ground grappling), reinforce good habits of posture and placement, and enable you to work out effectively whenever you are alone.

Here, young Nicky Ryan goes through his solo drills just prior to stepping onto the mat in competition.

30th May 2016 18:41 Speed vs Relative Speed:

Are you faster than Usain Bolt? This is a question that every single human on earth would currently have to answer negatively—provided we qualify the question with the usual unspoken assumptions: the race will be a fair one, on a standard athletic track, over 100-200 meters, etc. What if we started adding some seemingly strange conditions to the race?

Perhaps Mr. Bolt has to run with a fifty-pound weight vest strapped to his torso—this would definitely allow many good athletes to defeat him. What if he had a two-foot rope tying his legs together? Then many people could defeat him. What if the rope were shortened so that his ankles were locked together? Then almost any healthy young person could probably defeat him. What if his left foot was handcuffed to his right hand? In that case, I believe even I, with a crippled leg and a hip replacement, could probably defeat him (on a good day at least).

The point is that **EVEN THE BEST ATHLETICISM IN THE WORLD CAN BE OVERCOME IF WE SUFFICIENTLY HANDICAP OUR OPPONENT**. Jiu jitsu is essentially a means of doing exactly that.

JIU JITSU IS AN ELABORATE MEANS OF HANDICAPPING AN OPPONENT IN WAYS THAT STRONGLY UNDERMINE AND DEGRADE THEIR ATHLETIC POTENTIAL, RESULTING IN AN UNFAIR ADVANTAGE IN OUR FAVOR WHICH CAN BE EXPLOITED TO GAIN VICTORY.

In this way, bigger, stronger, faster people can, if the discrepancy in grappling technique is sufficiently in our favor, be controlled and defeated. Skills that don't seem overly impressive to beginners—subtle skills of control and positioning that prevent your opponent from freely utilizing their strength, speed, etc.—are, in fact, the very heart of the sport. The detailed study of **WHAT CAN MAKE A STRONG MAN WEAK, A FAST MAN SLOW, AND A HEAVY MAN LIGHT**, is the basis of our sport and can make for a lifetime of study.

Foundationalism:

When I taught philosophy courses at Columbia University, we often discussed the doctrine of Foundationalism as it applies to human knowledge. In terms of a sophisticated theory of human knowledge, I am not a foundationalist. However, when it comes to jiu jitsu, I am. Just as no builder would ever think of beginning the construction of a new house by working on the roof and attic, but instead digs deep into the earth to lay down secure and strong foundations, upon which each layer is sequentially built to provide strong support for the layer above it—so too, we must build our jiu jitsu in a similar way.

Just as any failure in the foundations of a house will immediately imply weakness in every other part of the house, weakness in the foundational aspects of our jiu jitsu can never be covered up by fancy flourishes in other areas of our game. Often, students come to me asking to learn aspects of our style that they see in competition. I always tell them the same thing: It is far easier for me to teach my leg lock system (or any other part of our approach to the game) to a person well-versed in the traditional foundations of the sport than it is to someone who wants to skip steps and jump straight into it.

There is a lot to be said for a sequential approach to learning jiu jitsu, where the foundational skills of **CONTROLLING MOVEMENT**—both my own and my opponent's—come first, and the more esoteric elements come second. Here, the squad's

youngest member, ten-year-old Mikey Wilson, learns the foundational elements of control and Kuzushi through the x guard/ashi garami complex as a precursor to the submissions game from the same positions.

Big Plans For New Year at Renzo Gracie Academy

Sensei Renzo Gracie has done an incredible job of bringing in the expertise of Judo superstar Jimmy Pedro and the Fuji mat company to install new mats at RGA NYC! Over the Christmas break, our staff and Team Fuji have been hard at work installing the mats and painting to give the academy what must be the best footing for grappling I have ever seen! The new mats look and feel incredible! I had the honor of teaching the first class on the new surface in our small room—it felt like I was teaching in a brand-new gym!

The squad came in full force and was joined by child prodigy Mikey Wilson and MMA superstar Jake Shields, who fights this Saturday in WSOF. He looked great on the mats today, doing his submission work with squad members. The professionalism and production of Team Fuji are impressive to behold. The blue basement has been transformed into a very eye-pleasing blue and grey space.

Sensei once told me that the best investment a man can make is in himself. That is exactly what he is doing now—investing in his dojo in a way that is transforming it daily. I am looking forward to a new year of training, goal-setting, and achievements at our "new" headquarters!

Huge thanks to Sensei, Mr. Jimmy Pedro, Team Fuji, the RGA staff, and our loyal students who come in every day to train around the temporary inconvenience of construction and change in order to improve their skills. The academy has never looked better!

Knowledge and Wisdom

From an early age, I have always been impressed by the classics of Asian literature. None impresses me more than the work of Lao Tzu, in particular, his statement: "To attain knowledge, add things every day; to attain wisdom, remove things every day." There is so much in this that pertains to our improvement in jiu jitsu. It begins with his crucial distinction between knowledge and wisdom.

Knowledge is a RESOURCE. It concerns facts and ideas that we seek to accumulate through study, research, and investigation.

Wisdom is very different. It is an ABILITY—the ability to discern the RELATIVE VALUE of these various pieces of knowledge and judge which ones are more important and necessary for achieving my goals. Initially, students in jiu jitsu are in a rush to accumulate knowledge. This is good because they are starting from naivety and need something firm to stand upon just to get started.

As they progress, they accumulate more and more facts as they delve deeper into the sport. However, at some stage, the student must—if they are to rise to the next level of development—make a critical switch in direction. The focus must shift away from the basic ACCUMULATION of facts and ideas to the DISCERNMENT of which ideas and facts are most important to their goals and focus.

There must be a progression from wasteful accumulation to trimming the knowledge base down to the essentials that drive you toward your goals. This is a replacement of new facts for conceptual ideas.

I would rather have knowledge of one fact that I use profitably every day than a thousand facts that I use once a decade. This shift from acquiring knowledge to acquiring wisdom is critical to high-level jiu jitsu. It allows you to look at a complex problem and quickly see its essential element so that a simple, workable solution can be implemented immediately.

Holiday

Today was a relaxed day of training for the squad - focus was more on technical development and sparring in a relaxed manner. This idea of variable intensity is critical to long term training. Not every session can be a war. Big holidays give a great opportunity to reinforce this idea to the athletes. I love to see athletes train every day, but not to see them train as hard as possible every day - that quickly leads to breakdowns. Improvement is measured in months and years, not days and weeks, so it is critical to be able train effectively over long periods. A huge part of this involves variation in intensity levels of daily training so that every day can represent a step

forward and as few days as possible are lost to attrition and injury. Now that work is done - it's time to eat - something the squad does very well. Merry Christmas to you all from NYC!!

Forcing Progress

Here is your text with the same words, but with slight adjustments for clarity and flow:

We all want to maximize our rates of progress in the sport. Most people work under the assumption that if they just show up for class, their progress will be satisfactory. In the early stages, this is usually correct, since the learning curve at introductory levels is very steep. However, at some point, you will encounter your first experience with growth plateaus. This can be very frustrating for a student who has grown accustomed to easy progress.

As a coach, a big part of my job is to make plateaus less likely to occur and also to help students get through them when they do happen. I have fond memories of my own first experience with growth plateaus and my sensei, Renzo Gracie's method of dealing with it.

When I first began jiu jitsu as a white belt, I was physically bigger and stronger than most of my classmates. Additionally, this was at a time when jiu jitsu was still very young in the United States, and the skill level among the average student was much lower than it is today. As a result, when grappling with the other white belts, I usually had an easy time and only got into trouble with the few blue and purple belts we had in class back then. In my mind, I thought I was doing extremely well compared to my peers.

You can imagine my surprise when sensei pulled me aside one day and told me how poor my overall game was and that my training needed to change! Mr. Gracie told me that from that point on, I was only allowed to start matches in inferior bottom positions and was not allowed any top position at all until told otherwise.

This change had an immediate effect—those same smaller white belts I had been dominating were now crushing me. Every match became an exhausting, frustrating battle for survival. It was immediately apparent that what I had thought was good training previously was anything but. I was forced to learn a whole new range of skills, tactics, and even mindset, and I grew greatly as a result.

This example highlights two important elements of good coaching. The first is obvious: by forcing a student into new areas, you can create progress. The second is less obvious: athletes are often not aware that they are in a plateau and sometimes need outside intervention.

Positive and negative - the two faces of jiu jitsu:

Here is your text with slight adjustments for clarity and flow while keeping the original words intact:

It is of the first importance to understand that in every aspect of jiu jitsu, there are two directions my game must push. On one hand, I must do everything in my power to facilitate my ability to move freely in the directions I desire (presumably towards control and submission). On the other hand, I must do everything in my power to undermine my opponent's ability to do the same.

Let us illustrate this point through the example of speed. Obviously, physical speed is a desirable trait in almost all sports, especially combat sports. When we first think of speed, we typically think of our ability to move quickly, comparing this to the speed of others.

In jiu jitsu, however, our speed potential is not nearly as important as our ability to undermine our opponent's ability to move quickly. To put it simply: I don't have to move quickly if I have first immobilized you. My need for speed is proportional to my ability to tie up and immobilize my opponent. The better my skill at undermining my opponent's ability to move, the less I will require physical attributes to succeed in sparring.

This ability to interfere with my opponent's physical attributes (the "negative" side of the game) is, in my opinion, more important than the development of your physical attributes.

This is not to say that physical training is unimportant—only a fool would claim that traits such as speed and strength are unimportant in combat. What I am saying is that more of your training time and thought should go into the skill of interfering with your opponent's attributes than into the development of your own.

Here, kohai student Oliver Taza does a fine job of tying up a struggling opponent with some more advanced elements of our back attack system. He has created a situation where it will be extremely difficult for his opponent to use his physical attributes with effect. Having negated those attributes, there is no need for speed now—Oliver can move at his pace and in the directions he wants, advancing toward submission.

New environment - new perspective:

I have always loved to teach in a new venue to strangers. I spend the vast majority of my teaching time in the basement of RGA with my long-suffering students. It is always a fascinating change of pace for me to go to a new venue and teach

strangers (and doubtless a relief to my poor students back home 😊). When I go to a new room to teach, my intention is not merely to show a set of techniques, but always to present a new mental framework within which those techniques are housed and arranged.

In truth, the most influential visiting teachers when I was a beginner were not those who showed me techniques—techniques come and go as your game changes and evolves—it was those who made me look at the sport in a new way. They inspired me to look into and research aspects of it in a manner that led to positive change and growth. It was **change in perspective**, rather than learning new tricks, that had the greatest benefit for me. I always try to reflect this when traveling and teaching.

As a stranger, it is unlikely that I can, in the time available, create substantial and lasting improvements to your technique. I have no doubt that I can improve them, perhaps even substantially improve them, but in a single session, I cannot give you the heel-hooking skill of my best students. One thing I can do, however, is change your perspective and introduce new modes of thinking that, with sufficient dedication on your part, can point you in directions that lead to real improvement and lasting change.

I try to use the techniques to show a way of thinking about development that will create improvements—not just for a single day, but for as long as those ideas continue to interest you. Here, I teach at my good friend and former classmate at RGA, Shawn Williams, at his school in LA. Because Mr. Williams and I share a common history and philosophy, it's not so different from other schools I visit. Still, the notion of using techniques—not as an end in themselves, but as a vehicle for a new perspective on a given part of the sport—is the same. Just sixteen hours after this photo was taken in LA, I was back in the blue basement in NYC teaching class.

Great day of Grappling at Studio 540 San Diego:

The squad went into a tough day of grappling under extended time-limit EBI rules today in San Diego, with mixed results but all positive experiences. Fifteen-year-old Nicky Ryan lost in overtime to the very talented 19-year-old Kennedy Maciel in a great match between two super-talented youngsters, both with a world of grappling ahead of them.

Mr. Maciel showed great positional skill with excellent passing and pinning control, along with a superb transition from back control to triangle (sankaku) in overtime, securing a great win and showcasing his potential.

In the adult matches, Garry Tonon faced a very impressive Kim Terra, who came out looking to play a positive attacking game—a very praiseworthy approach given that he's in a weight division below Mr. Tonon. Within regulation time, however, Mr. Tonon was able to make a very nice transition from back crucifix to high-elbow

guillotine, following Mr. Terra's defensive maneuvers and securing a beautiful submission victory.

In the final match, it was Gordon Ryan's turn to face a larger opponent. He did a fine job of dominating the submission attacks, while his world champion opponent, the very talented Felipe Pena, dominated the positional aspects. At the 42-minute mark, however, Mr. Pena capitalized brilliantly on a mistaken entry to ashi garami, took the back, and sank an excellent strangle to claim a great victory.

There was much for the squad to take away and learn from—much to be happy about, and much to improve upon. Tomorrow, I will teach a seminar in LA, and then it's back to the basement of wisdom in NYC on Monday to start making the changes necessary to improve and win. ☐☐☐

Thanks to Studio 540 and FloGrappling for putting on a great event. Thanks also to Eddie Bravo for another great job of impartial and skillful refereeing. Most of all, thank you to my athletes who give their all and have come so far in such a short time. I am immensely proud of all you have done and extremely confident in even greater future success.

Meanwhile, as I wait for a plane to California, Eddie Cummings waits for a plane to Costa Rica! Mr. Cummings will teach the first squad seminar at the dojo of my friend and student Arturo Wesson, who regularly travels all the way to NYC to train in our method and bring that knowledge back to his students at home. I am delighted to see Mr. Cummings heading south to spread our message of control leading to submission.

Of all my competitive students, Mr. Cummings has spent the most time with me in private classes and has the deepest knowledge of my leg attack system. He is much more than that, however. Like all my students, he is an independent and innovative thinker who has developed his own specialized methods, making him arguably the finest ashi garami exponent in the world.

There is a sense in which Mr. Cummings is the victim of his own success—his leg attacks are so effective that few outside of those he trains with have seen his other great skills. His outstanding back attacks, superb attacks from front headlock, and truly excellent armlock and triangle (juji gatame and sankaku) attacks, among others, are truly remarkable. He is a fine teacher, and I am delighted that our Costa Rican friends will get the chance to see such high-level technique explained by such a fine practitioner who can really express the depth of his knowledge.

If you're there, don't miss it! Just don't let him anywhere near the ice cream or pineapple juice stand, or he'll gain 100 pounds of blubber in a day!

Mr. Cummings will be training hard with the squad when he returns—big plans for the new year! Stay tuned! A big hello to Costa Rican jiu jitsu in general and Mr. Arturo Wesson in particular—have fun!

JFK - California Bound:

Waiting at JFK after another missed flight. Looking forward to meeting up with squad members as they prepare for action on Saturday. Gordon Ryan, Nicky Ryan, and Garry Tonon will face off against three extremely talented Brazilian grapplers—each with an outstanding pedigree and competition record.

As always with the squad, it's been a rough week with minor mishaps, illnesses, miscalculations, and general tomfoolery 😊 but come Saturday, we will be ready for action and ready to put on a show at Studio 540 in San Diego. I leave frigid NYC for the sunshine and smiles of Southern California ☐

Always a good feeling! The squad continues to impress me with their continual technical development—so many new moves and tactics added to their ever-expanding repertoire. They face a very tough test on Saturday, however. Young Nicky, just 15 years old, will take on 19-year-old Kennedy Maciel, the current world champion at purple belt and son of Ruben Charles—"Cobrinha."

Mr. Maciel exhibits the same superb sense of movement and transition as his illustrious father and clearly has a big future ahead of him. Kim Terra, brother of jiu jitsu icon Caio Terra, has carved out a fine competition record of his own. These two brothers are known for the depth of their technical knowledge, and this will be a fascinating stylistic contrast to be sure.

Felipe Pena will square off with Gordon Ryan in the main event. Mr. Pena is at the top of the jiu jitsu world, both gi and no-gi. I well remember his outstanding performance at the last ADCC. He is a mix of physical power with very refined technique that enabled him to go toe-to-toe with heavyweight icon Rodolfo Vieira. In a titanic struggle, he showed he can go extended periods against the world's best. He is a tremendous opponent.

Sitting on plastic chairs at the airport, listening to the muzak, eating the lousy food, and watching people scuttle by is usually pretty damn boring—but the thought of getting the squad ready for this epic challenge makes it much more exciting! 😊

Gaining and retaining:

Imagine you met a man who told you that his annual income was one million dollars. Would you not be impressed by his wealth? I believe most of us certainly would. What if that man then revealed that his annual expenses were \$975,000? Would you still be impressed by his wealth? Probably much less so.

When it comes to accruing wealth, the amount of money coming in is not nearly as important as the amount you retain. **Exactly the same is true of knowledge.** So often, I see students chasing after more and more knowledge. This is a good and

desirable trait. However, never forget that the important issue is not how much knowledge you accumulate, but **how much you retain**. It is only the knowledge you can access and remember that will prove useful to you in future action.

It is critical, therefore, that your attempts at gaining knowledge focus as much on **knowledge retention** as they do on **knowledge acquisition**. You must have a program in place that solidifies the knowledge you have gained in a way that enables you to access it on demand, leading to effective action on the mat. For a group of professional athletes like the squad, this is relatively easy, as we spend large amounts of time together, beginning and ending each session with discussions of the central concepts and problems we're working on—along with vast amounts of repetition to cement knowledge in place.

For most people, however, this may not be possible due to busy lives, professional commitments, family obligations, etc. In these cases, I always recommend the same methods we used (well, partially successfully 😊) in school and college: note-taking, periodic reviews, occasional informal tests, etc. By shifting focus from acquisition to retention of knowledge, you will quickly find that the knowledge you have translates into more effective action.

Here, squad members discuss technique and strategy before stepping out onto the mat for competition (shiai). This helps ensure the themes we want to express in the match are at the forefront of the athlete's mind as they face their opponent.

Setting tough goals for progress:

I believe that the progress you make in your chosen field will be determined by the goals you set. If your goals are modest, your progress will likely be modest as well. However, if you set difficult and challenging goals, the greater effort required to pursue them will ensure greater progress—even in cases where the goals are not fully met.

I often create very difficult short-term challenges for developing students, knowing that the hard work and study required to overcome those challenges almost always lead to progress. For example, Oliver Taza is a rapidly improving kohai student who is making all the right commitments necessary for championship grappling in the future. He wanted a tough assignment to gauge his progress, so he entered a tournament this weekend—a 10th Planet brown belt invitational at 205 pounds. This was a very strong test for him, as Oliver typically competes at around 165-170 pounds.

To make the challenge even more interesting, we set the goal of victory by submission in all matches—not an easy task given the rank of the event and the level of competition. Mr. Taza trained with his usual great commitment, paying close attention to the critical details that make the difference between success and near success. In a superb display of skill, he did exactly what he set out to do—winning every match by submission (a mix of leg locks and triangle strangles), each time against much larger opponents, and doing so in a dynamic and impressive style.

These kinds of difficult short-term goals, interspersed with your long-term goals, are some of the best ways to maintain progress over time while keeping a bridge between short-term achievements and long-term ideals. Of course, it's great when the goals are attained, as was the case with Mr. Taza. But the deeper point is that even if they aren't, you will still be closer to your long-term goal of excellence in jiu-jitsu.

Reflections on my sensei:

When I first began jiu-jitsu in the early to mid-1990s, the martial arts scene was very different. This was the era of style versus style in MMA, as opposed to the modern spirit of well-rounded athletes facing off against each other. At the time, jiu-jitsu was still proving itself among more established traditional martial arts and combat sports. As a result, most jiu-jitsu practitioners adopted an "us vs. them" mentality—something that was necessary in order for BJJ to show it was a viable art that could stand on its own merits.

One of the great insights of my sensei, Renzo Gracie, was that while this attitude was necessary in the beginning, it could be limiting in the long term. He strongly encouraged all his students to engage in the study of other arts—especially those with a competitive sports aspect like boxing, Muay Thai, wrestling, judo, sambo, and others. I can say of my sensei that he was intensely proud of jiu-jitsu and his lineage within it, but at the same time, he was endlessly curious about other combat sports and how they could be incorporated to improve performance in jiu-jitsu.

This insistence on some degree of cross-training was, I believe, one of the reasons why Mr. Gracie was able to maintain such a modern and cutting-edge atmosphere at his school after more than 20 years in the USA. I've seen countless students benefit from cross-training—some more, some less—but I have **never** seen a student get worse from it. Nowadays, cross-training is the norm, with most jiu-jitsu athletes incorporating wrestling, judo, and other arts into their routines.

If you ever find yourself stagnating or in a jiu-jitsu plateau, take inspiration from my sensei's example: find new directions and insights in another art. It will only make your jiu-jitsu stronger.

The great problem of endurance:

The Importance of Technique and Pace Control in Endurance

When I watch beginners training together, the most common cause of defeat is fatigue. Beginners often lack the technical skills to secure a victory through pure technique, so they tend to wear themselves out, unable to resist for long, and eventually succumb. This issue usually improves with time, but it remains to some extent throughout our jiu-jitsu careers.

Everyone must confront and overcome this challenge if they wish to stay in the sport. The problem is, most people try to address it in the wrong way. The majority of students approach it by attempting to change their bodies—they work on becoming stronger and fitter. While this is certainly beneficial and helps to some degree, **the improvements in endurance gained from strength and fitness are minimal compared to those that come from increased mechanical efficiency in technique and pace control during a match.**

For example, it may take a significant amount of time and effort to increase your maximum bench press by just 10%. That increase, however, will barely be noticeable to your opponent in sparring. On the other hand, small improvements in the placement of lever and fulcrum as you apply technique throughout a match will be immediately felt by your opponent as increased force, and by you as energy savings. When combined with effective pace control, these improvements will lead to dramatic increases in grappling endurance—without any significant changes in your physiology.

Let me be clear: I am not arguing that strength and fitness are irrelevant or unimportant—they are essential (otherwise, the widespread issue of steroid use in our sport would never have emerged). What I am saying is that the far more significant element in grappling endurance is technical efficiency and pace control. If you want substantial improvements, don't focus on changing your body; focus on improving your technical insight and managing your pace.

Here, Gordon Ryan demonstrates superb pace control and technical efficiency in his marathon victory against the great Keenan Cornelius.

Both Ryan boys

are entering a phase of grappling maturity where the athletes are beginning to develop their own moves and tactics in ways that are truly exciting for me as a coach to observe. I'm confident that this growth and innovation will be evident in the upcoming matchup between these two rising stars.

The true training camp begins tomorrow. Today, we focused on setting clear directions and goals, followed by some light rolling. The squad will return tomorrow, and from there, it's full speed ahead!

First workout of the day - New York City: Second workout of the day - Mexico City:

At the airport now, waiting for flight to Mexico in prep for EBI 10, just finishing working with

Messrs Gordon and Nicky Ryan who are training brilliantly. Looking forward to seeing

Mr Cummings and crew and getting in some more prep work for the big show. Mr Cummings always greatly impresses me in training, but never more than in his training

for this show. Looking forward to the change in venue and hats off to Mr Bravo and his

great crew for helping to grow this great sport in new directions with such an exciting

line up of talent for this lightweight event. Looks like the thin air of Mexico City has had

some strange effects on Ottavia Bourdain and Mr Garry Tonon...

Growing together:

As Kano so wisely insisted, the best form of benefit is mutual benefit. When two people work together and each brings something valuable to the table, great things can result from their shared efforts. In my daily coaching, I see this most clearly in the development of the Ryan brothers — Gordon and Nicky. Their symbiotic relationship is an inspiration to the other athletes around them. As one rises, the other must rise to stay in the game, and the one who helps him rise the most is his own brother.

Mutual growth is the healthiest state for the training room, and there's no better example than these two. Both are deep into preparation for tough matches at Studio 540 in San Diego on December 17, where they will compete under a variation of EBI rules (with much longer regulation time before overtime begins). When the squad returns from Mexico City this weekend, camp will begin in earnest for both Ryan brothers and Garry Tonon in what promises to be an incredible event.

Meanwhile, Georges St-Pierre is working out with the squad... In Mexico City... One of my principal aims as a coach is to cultivate a sense of independence in the senior students (Senpai). When we talk about technique and strategy, we speak as equals. Indeed, the senior students often impress me with the depth of their insight and originality. The greatest gift a teacher can give is not technique, strategy, or any of the typical things people judge the worth of teachers by, but rather the ability to research and progress independently.

Instilling this sense of creative independence in the senior students has several great consequences. One of them is visible in this photo collage. Eddie Cummings is currently in Mexico City preparing for EBI 10 on Friday night, working with local jiu-jitsu players using the same system the squad members used today to train in NYC with Georges St-Pierre. Georges, in turn, will return to Montreal tonight to independently train with what he learned today. If all these senior students could only blindly follow orders, this kind of cross-pollination of ideas would be impossible. It is their ability to grow independently that ensures the growth of ideas, which in turn keeps our overall program evolving and improving.

Looking forward to the squad reuniting with Mr. Cummings on Wednesday night in Mexico City for the big show!

Founding member of the squad:

Mr. Georges St-Pierre returned to the "basement of wisdom" through pain for some excellent training sessions with the younger athletes. The majority of my time training with Mr. St-Pierre was spent developing grapple boxing skills for professional MMA, which is quite different from pure submission grappling. After his retirement, he has had the opportunity to focus on submission grappling, and he's made impressive progress.

Here, the squad watches as Mr. St-Pierre works on ashi garami drills with his partner, Garry Tonon. We use these drills to deepen our mechanical understanding of the position, which increases our chances of success under the pressure of live combat, whether in the gym or during competition (shiai). Often, I have the students teach the move back to the class to ensure they have a solid understanding of the core concepts and principles that underlie its application.

A huge part of Mr. St-Pierre's success came from his constant willingness to continue training and learning throughout his entire career, and even beyond it, with specialists in various domains. This allowed him to integrate these skills into the broader context of MMA. Even in pure submission grappling, he is one of the toughest training partners for the squad as they prepare for shiai — truly remarkable, given that submission grappling is not his primary focus.

Now, here's the promo for the upcoming EBI 10, featuring Eddie Cummings against some of the best 135-pound submission artists in the game. Among the competitors is Geo Martinez, the current 135-pound belt holder, and a man the squad considers the best from the 10th Planet team. Additionally, there is a strong Brazilian contingent and several other standout competitors. This promises to be one of the most tightly contested EBIs ever.

Mr. Cummings' preparation has been superb, but I'm sure the other competitors would say the same about their own training. Once again, huge thanks to Mr. Bravo and his team for the fantastic promo, venue, and production. Their efforts continue to push the growth of our sport in exciting new directions. Enjoy!

From the basement to the bright lights:

Eddie Cummings completed the NYC section of his camp for EBI 10 in the "basement of suffering" today. As always, both senior and junior members of the squad were present to assist with his preparation. Taking the skills honed and refined in the gym and translating them into performance under the bright lights of competition is one of the toughest tests an athlete can face. The squad is fortunate to have a tight camaraderie that supports this transition. While it's possible to simulate the expected conditions in training, there comes a point when the athlete must rise to the occasion on the big stage, facing unfamiliar opponents, new circumstances, and the critical gaze of the audience.

I have always been deeply impressed by the squad's ability to do this. More than any other phase of match preparation, this is the moment where an athlete must go beyond the help offered by their team and coaches, and find the will and ability within themselves to achieve their goals. The next time the squad meets as a whole will be in Mexico City, where once again, the gap between the gym and the stage must be bridged.

"Coach, how's my submission game coming along?" "Feeble. You couldn't leg lock a man with no arms, nor arm lock a man with no legs; furthermore, you are wholly incapable of strangling a man who has neither arms nor legs."

Nothing earns thanks from the squad more than a mat crowded with dedicated and ambitious athletes, all working on their skills in the kingly art of jiu-jitsu. Early tomorrow, that's exactly what you'll find in the "basement of despair and hope" at RGA, as the squad helps Eddie Cummings prepare for his third EBI belt in the 135-pound weight class in Mexico City next week. Skill development does not recognize holidays. Mr. Cummings and his squad mates are keenly aware of this, and we're planning for a strong session tomorrow.

Afterwards, however, our national holiday offers us a chance to reflect on our dual nature — as individuals with private ambitions and as citizens with civic duties and an awareness of our nation. Without the framework of our community, no individual ambition or achievement would be possible. We hope you find happiness tomorrow, both as individuals and, perhaps more importantly, as members of family and

nation, in ways that highlight our nature as individuals within a greater collective. It is only by understanding both aspects of our nature that true greatness is possible.

Perspective:

In recent days and weeks, the jiu-jitsu scene has seen a noticeable increase in provocative talk between camps, much of which has centered around my students and those of Marcelo Garcia. This is unusual, as Mr. Garcia and I are good friends. As is often the case, what begins as banter and play can sometimes lead to unintended consequences. Both Mr. Garcia and I are committed to maintaining a strong distinction between the spirit of MMA — where talk and showmanship can be good for business — and jiu-jitsu, where a more elevated sense of conduct is appropriate.

I fully support jiu-jitsu athletes being paid more for their hard work, but I am concerned that this may come at the expense of the soul of the sport. Moreover, our schools are literal neighbors, just blocks apart, and neither of us wants an "us vs them" mentality here in the NYC jiu-jitsu scene. I met with Mr. Garcia tonight at his school, and we discussed the situation. He is much more than just one of the sport's greatest champions — he is an icon and a role model, in my experience, the kindest and gentlest soul in the sport.

As a result, we have both agreed that the mood of the past few days is detrimental to the sport, and even worse for the NYC jiu-jitsu scene. Therefore, both teams will stop the negative social media talk and direct challenge matches (athletes will still participate in regular tournaments, but for now, no internet challenge matches). I've met most of Mr. Garcia's team, and they are all great people. Our squad might be a bit rough around the edges at times, but they all have hearts of gold — I don't teach people whose character I don't respect; I simply don't interact with them.

I believe this situation is a result of fundamentally good people allowing words and escalation to put them in a position that ultimately doesn't benefit the sport as a whole. Mr. Garcia is one of the most sincere and well-meaning individuals I've ever met, and I believe his concerns about the sport and the relationship between NYC jiu-jitsu teams are entirely valid. We all love competition and friendly rivalry, but a sense of perspective is crucial to keeping it appropriate and ensuring the continued health of the sport we all love.

Beastie Boy:

Nicky Ryan, at just 15 years old, entered one of the toughest grappling tournaments in North America yesterday — the ADCC World Championship Trials. Mr. Ryan won his first two matches by submission (using heel hook variations) before losing via armbar, ultimately securing 3rd place. This is an incredible achievement for such a young athlete.

Mr. Ryan has always greatly impressed me with his determination and maturity. Generally, I have reservations about very young competitors entering adult competitions due to the higher risk of injury, and I've always felt there's something undesirable about pushing young athletes into tournaments too early. I prefer to let time pass, allowing them to grow and mature before entering such challenging events on their own accord.

In Mr. Ryan's case, however, I made an exception. His older brother trains with him daily and coaches him, and Mr. Ryan is exceptionally mentally mature for his age (far more so than most of the other members of our squad!). As always, he put on a great performance, working hard to secure submissions, as is our style. This young man has immense potential, and it's truly an honor to be a small part of his journey.

There will be many more ADCC trials for him, and as his body matures to match his already impressive mind, you will all come to see the same potential I see in him now.

Mr Eddie Cummings:

With EBI 10 fast approaching, Eddie Cummings is about to take on a new challenge — his first EBI at 135 pounds. His record at previous EBI events has been nothing short of outstanding, with a perfect record of submissions within regulation time, most of which came in far less than the allotted time. This time, however, he faces three new elements.

First, the competition is among the best ever assembled in an EBI. Geo Martinez, whom we consider the top athlete from the 10th Planet team, will be competing, along with a very strong Brazilian contingent, including the outstanding Samir Chantre and Rafael Freitas. This may well be the strongest overall EBI card since EBI 6.

The second new challenge will be the weight cut. Despite his small frame, Mr. Cummings has always competed above his weight category and has never needed to lose weight to compete before. This will certainly be an interesting test for him.

Third, the altitude in Mexico City will present a challenge for all competitors. Mexico City's thinner air will affect everyone, except the locals, and this is something we have no experience with. It's definitely a concern, but one that will affect all athletes equally.

As always, Mr. Cummings will rely on his deep knowledge of submissions to navigate these challenges. Of all my students, he has spent the most time with me in private classes and has a superb understanding of the mechanical details behind our favorite attacks. Here, we work both offensive and defensive strategies in irimi ashi garami — a position in which Mr. Cummings truly excels and has built a reputation for extremely effective use in competition (shiai).

Interestingly, one consequence of his excellence in ashi garami attacks is that he has had fewer opportunities to showcase his other submission strengths. And make no mistake, he has many. I suspect it's only a matter of time before the world sees what we witness every day in the gym.

An observation:

When I sit down to write my daily Instagram or Facebook posts, I often rely on the photographs my students and friends send me. Typically, I post visually striking images of competition victories, dramatic training moments, or photos that capture an important principle or theme. However, today, as I sifted through my photo archive, I realized that for every eye-catching image, I have at least fifty mundane shots — pictures that show the reality of daily training: fatigue, frustration, repetition, and pain.

A quick reflection reminded me that this is the true experience of jiu jitsu on a daily basis. We often carry a mental image of the sport that mirrors a highlight reel — remembering the big victories, the defeats, the breakthroughs, the challenges, and the drama. But the reality, day in and day out, is a repetitious slog toward distant goals. It's essential to find ways to make that grind enjoyable and rewarding, or you simply won't last.

Everyone finds their own way to do this, but humor, camaraderie, and goal-setting are perhaps the most effective methods. This is another way that jiu jitsu mirrors life. Just as life is a daily grind, punctuated by moments of joy and sadness, jiu jitsu follows the same pattern. The majority of training is filled with discomfort and frustration, but it's those moments that propel us forward toward our more memorable peaks.

In this photo, you can see the strain of high-level competition preparation on Eddie Cummings' face as he takes a brief pause after a tough morning class. With EBI 10 in Mexico City approaching, Eddie must now focus on weight loss before moving on to an afternoon class. While our memories often highlight the highs and lows, we must remember that it's the countless forgotten days of struggle and grinding toward our goals that ultimately make those peak moments possible.

A word of support for Mr Bravo:

One of the costs of being an innovator is criticism. In general, people resist change, especially when they've invested a lot of time in the status quo. One of Eddie Bravo's most significant innovations was his competition rule set, which includes overtime to ensure a decisive result within a reasonable time frame. A notable part of his overtime rules was the inclusion of classical jiu jitsu submission positions — specifically the rear mount and juji gatame (armlock), which he refers to as the "spider web" position. This innovation received significant criticism, mainly because people believed that athletes should never be "given" these positions but should have to "earn" them.

I believe, however, that jiu jitsu needs several different rule sets to ensure the sport's skills remain strong and continue to evolve in healthy directions. And while I understand the criticism, I truly believe Mr. Bravo's overtime innovation is a positive development for the sport. To begin with, in the EBI format, athletes have ten uninterrupted minutes to earn whatever positions they want, similar to the time allowed in IBJJF rules.

Once in overtime, however, they must choose between two of the most classical finishing positions in jiu jitsu — back control (for a strangle) and the armlock. This is where things get interesting. The overwhelming majority of jiu jitsu athletes spend about 95% of their defensive training on *not* getting into bad positions, with only a small fraction dedicated to learning how to *escape* once they are in those positions. The EBI overtime rules force athletes to address this imbalance.

For the first time, athletes must devote serious training time to defending and escaping from two of the most fundamental and dangerous submission positions. They can no longer just train to avoid the attack initially; they must learn how to fight their way out from the completed position. This requires real skill. As a coach, I can personally attest that these overtime rules have forced both me and my athletes to learn a lot more about defensive strategy and technique in these classic submissions — and that has proven to be a healthy and important development for our athletes.

Formality and informality:

As a general rule, I prefer a more informal class setting. While formality has its place in children's and beginner classes, I don't emphasize it in advanced training. I don't particularly like being called "professor"; I prefer to work with first names, and my students do the same. We laugh a lot and share plenty of inappropriate (but usually funny) jokes throughout the day.

I've always believed that the deepest forms of respect are unspoken in daily life and only articulated on special occasions. Ceremonial gestures — such as belts, saying "osu" after every statement, or calling everyone above you in rank "professor" — are things we reserve for a few select moments.

I've always appreciated the informal atmosphere my master, Renzo Gracie, fostered. There wasn't an overemphasis on the formalities of respect. Instead, there was a stronger, unspoken sense of respect for him and the work we were doing together than in any ceremonially lavish environment I've seen. Real respect manifests in meaningful actions, not in words or rituals.

When I see my athletes getting up at 5 a.m. for morning class, training between sessions, working out on their own in the evening, studying, and practicing the moves and concepts we teach, pushing through pain, fatigue, and injury to finish a workout, or making the extra effort to help a teammate prepare for competition — how could I not respect them? What words can truly express the respect I feel for these men and women who do this, not just for weeks or months, but for years, until they break through to their goals? Some things are better left unsaid.

I focus on performance improvement and let respect grow naturally from there. In this photo, the squad is relaxing after another tough workout preparing Eddie Cummings for EBI 10. Judging by the looks on our faces, there's a 99% chance we're talking about women or some other fun topic — anything but jiu jitsu performance!

EBI 10 coming soon:

Eddie Cummings has been putting in an incredible amount of work for EBI 10, now competing at a new weight of 135 pounds. He's been adding new attacks to his already formidable arsenal and is aiming to deliver another outstanding performance under the bright lights. This time, the event will take place in Mexico City.

As part of the trip, I'll be teaching a seminar on some of the key elements that have contributed to our team's success at past events. The seminar will be hosted by my old teammate, Mario Delgado Davila, who runs a very successful school in Mexico City. This will be my first visit to Mexico, and I'm really looking forward to exploring the land, the city, and the jiu jitsu culture of this great country. I hope to contribute in some small way to the growth of the sport, particularly in the areas where our squad has made a significant impact.

Drilling without sparring is unrealistic:

Sparring Without Drilling Limits Growth

Students often ask me about the structure of their training, and the most fundamental element of that structure is the relationship between sparring and drilling. While there are many other training methods that have their place, sparring and drilling form the core foundation of development.

Nothing beats live sparring for allowing a student to practice their skills in realistic conditions, under the same pressure they would face in competition. Sparring, in all its variations and intensity levels, is the gold standard for contest preparation.

However, sparring alone is not enough. The problem with sparring, especially when it's intense, is that it tends to push us to rely on our most trusted moves to win. If I'm facing a tough opponent, I'll naturally fall back on my favorite techniques (tokui waza) to secure the victory. This is fine for refining those trusted moves, but in the long run, it can stunt the growth of your game by limiting the introduction of new techniques. This can make you predictable and leave you feeling stagnant, which is frustrating.

That's where drilling comes in. Drilling allows you to practice techniques with little to no resistance, helping you build confidence and understand the mechanics and principles of a move. As you grow more skilled, those moves can then be integrated into sparring until they become a natural part of your overall game. This ensures continuous development in your training.

Thus, the essential role of both sparring and drilling: sparring enhances your ability to apply techniques in real-world scenarios, while drilling expands your repertoire and prepares you to use a wider range of techniques during sparring. This dual approach leads to constant performance improvements.

Our training mantra is simple: **DRILLING WITHOUT SPARRING IS UNREALISTIC; SPARRING WITHOUT DRILLING LIMITS GROWTH.** Here, Garry Tonon and Gordon Ryan practice leg-locking drills in England before Polaris 4, where these skills later earned Mr. Tonon a victory via leg lock.

A truly remarkable performance:

UFC 205 had many outstanding performances, but the main event star, Conor McGregor, saved the best until last with a stunning victory against the titleholder and immensely talented Eddie Alvarez. Much of what guides our intuitions as to an athlete's ability is not just who they beat, but how they beat them. In truth, it was shocking to watch the degree to which McGregor used superb control of distance, pace, timing, and placement to dismantle such a talented and tough opponent. In doing so, he did what he said he would—hold two belts at the same time.

Whatever one's opinion of McGregor's public antics outside of fighting, one cannot deny that he has backed up what many see as overly brash talk with brilliant and successful action. Moreover, he has made huge waves in the sport in relatively little time. It was not long ago that people were discussing him as a talented newcomer and whether he was really worthy of a title shot at all. Now, he has two belts around

his waist—both won against extremely good opponents via very impressive knockouts.

In addition, he has shown a true champion's ability to come back from a bad loss in short order and not just rectify the loss, but greatly surpass where he was prior to that loss. While his style seems almost entirely built around the ability to get his dangerous left hand to bear upon his opponent, and there are open questions about his ability to prevail when he can't, no one can deny the incredible achievements he has made with his relatively narrow skill set in a sport where we typically believe a very wide skill set is essential just to survive, let alone achieve world-beating success.

His lifestyle, his demeanor, his fighting style, and his goals all make him the biggest risk-taker in the sport. It's impressive to see a man stand on the cusp of disaster and ridicule on the basis of those risks, yet through the power of his personality, self-belief, and skill, turn it all into a bigger triumph. Hats off to a truly great fighter and personality who took the biggest event in MMA history and made it his own.

Similarly, we see Eddie Cummings applying pressure to his opponent's leg via heel hook at EBI 9. The big size difference is easily overcome as excellent positioning and precise placement of the lever and fulcrum create crushing power with excellent control.

Reflections on my senior students:

I am often asked how different body types influence the way I coach students. I've talked about this in the past. A question I am asked much less often, but which is, in my opinion, more important, is that of **TACTICAL STYLE** and how that influences my coaching. When you look at my three senior competing students, it is obvious that they are physically very different, but more importantly, they are tactically very different as well.

Gordon Ryan has a **PRESSURE**-based game where the pressure he applies elicits defensive reactions that create opportunities. **Garry Tonon** has a **SCRAMBLE**-based game centered around using movement, where he controls the direction and pace of that movement to create advantage. **Eddie Cummings** has a **KUZUSHI**-based game, where he works from the bottom position to off-balance people in ways that create advantage (Interestingly, Mr. Cummings' game is the most similar to my own of the three).

The great theme that I push to my students is this - **WHATEVER DIFFERENCES THERE ARE IN TACTICAL STYLE, THE FINISHING POSITIONS ARE THE SAME FOR ALL.**

Thus, my students may employ very different overall approaches to the game, yet all have very similar finishing holds. In this way, I approach the great problem of **SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE** in jiu-jitsu: How to reconcile the need to promote individualism and spontaneity while remaining true to the mechanical nature of the

sport, which is based around levers and fulcrums and whose strictures dictate the same way to all, regardless of difference.

In this way, jiu-jitsu can function both as a means of self-expression and as a humbling lesson in the primacy of physics over our wants and desires.

Tomorrow, it's back to the basement of suffering to refine and develop skills for the squad. The **ADCC trials** are around the corner. Eddie Cummings must step up to face the challenge of **EBI 10** at a new weight of 135 pounds – against the man we consider the best of Eddie Bravo's students – **Geo Martinez**. He is very interesting as an opponent because he is one of the few remaining 10th Planet athletes who is truly skilled in the 10th Planet system based around **rubber guard, lockdown half guard, and twister**, rather than the modern 10th Planet athletes' style, which is basically cloned after our own style.

Mr. Cummings' preparation so far has been superb, but his aspirations are even higher. Then, **Gordon** and **Nicky Ryan** face big superfight challenges in San Diego – so it's back to training and development for the squad. Time to turn off the disco lights and crank up the **ashi garamis**.

Reflections on EBI 9 and rule sets:

The remarkable victory of welterweight **Garry Tonon** over a distinguished field of light heavyweights has impressed many, but underneath that victory are some interesting reflections upon the notion of rule sets and promoting desirable behavior among competitors, as well as the direction of growth in the sport. The fundamental problem the sport faces is this: on one hand, we want to make the sport progress in directions that express our ideals; on the other hand, athletes want to win, by whatever means the rule sets allow. In practice, this often means that athletes will utilize the rule set to achieve victory in ways that fulfill the letter of the rules but not the spirit of the rules.

Thus, they exploit the rule set by acting in ways that increase the likelihood of their victory, but which go against our ideals of the sport. At **EBI 9**, it was obvious that some athletes were looking to stall to get to the overtime and then exploit the overtime rules to secure victory. While this is perfectly legal and even understandable (after all, every athlete wants to win), it results in a situation where the ideal of the sport – that we must look to secure control that leads to submission at all times – is lost.

The usual response is to change the rules to prohibit undesired behavior. My point is this – you can never really legislate away the natural tendency of athletes to exploit a given rule set in ways that raise the likelihood of them winning – that's just what athletes do. **GOOD ATTACKING, POSITIVE JIU-JITSU COMES FROM A**

MINDSET, NOT A RULE SET. Ultimately, negative stalling behavior is a coaching problem, not a legislative problem.

Athletes must be coached towards the ideal of the sport so that they express that ideal regardless of the rule set. Most of the great players of the last decade – **Roger Gracie, Braulio Estima, Marcelo Garcia**, etc. – applied an approach of attacking to submission regardless of the rule set they operated under, and this is a big part of what made them great.

Here, **Garry Tonon** takes gold at **EBI 9**, where he embodied once again the ideal of constant attempts at control leading to submission, regardless of time or rules.

The spirit of attack:

Garry Tonon showed that a smaller man can carry a proactive attack strategy even against larger opponents tonight as he won **EBI 9**. Even when he failed to get a submission in regulation time, it was not for lack of trying. Here, he jumps into a flying **sankaku** (triangle) attack, demonstrating the kind of calculated risk-taking, backed by skill, required to make this approach work. Once again, **Mr. Eddie Bravo** put on a great show and format for the athletes, and once again, the squad showed up looking not just to win, but to do so in a way that showcases the best aspects of the sport and helps it grow.

I'm currently on an airplane at **LAX**, preparing to take the redeye back to **NYC** to teach tomorrow morning.

Normally, the redeye flight back from **LA** is horrid – but when you have a student like **Garry Tonon** performing the way he does, it's a lot easier to enjoy the flight home. Looking forward to seeing all my students tomorrow – thank you all so much for your help in getting the squad ready for the big shows. We could not do this without all of you.

Mission impossible-Accomplished:

Garry Tonon celebrates his third title after winning **EBI 9** in dramatic fashion via overtime riding advantage. He fought his way to the finals, where he faced the great **Vinny Magalhaes**, a former ADCC champion. It was the toughest **EBI** yet for Mr. Tonon, as he was a last-minute replacement for injured teammate **Gordon Ryan**. He had just fought under a different rule set a week ago in **England** and then suffered a small but deep cut that interfered with the little preparation time he had in a weight division far above his own.

Yet with characteristic professionalism, skill, and gung-ho spirit, he battled through to a win over the big men and showed that the true spirit of **jiu jitsu** – built around the ideal of lesser size and strength controlling and defeating greater size and strength – is not empty talk. With the right training and strategy, it became a reality on the stage of the **Orpheum Theater in LA** at **EBI 9**.

Weigh ins for EBI 9:

Normally, weigh-ins are a juggling act of training preparation and weight cutting. This time, however, **Garry Tonon** is massively underweight for the weight class, so there is no thought of weight cutting. As always, we have to sign paperwork for the show—**Mr. Tonon**'s responses to the various media questions on his fact sheet were interesting, to say the least.

Other sports? **Gymnastics, professional bull riding, and nude chess...** um... right.

Previous accomplishments? **5X Chilean Sambo champion?**... ok...

Why do you compete? The three C's... **cash, chicks, and championships...** um... right...

This boy has his priorities straight.

Three deadliest leg lockers in the world heading to EBI for grappling showdown:

This photo will definitely bring fear to the hearts of the squad's opponents as they prepare for a submission showdown in LA. These three deadly warriors are at the forefront of martial arts, looking to show their lethal skills in the City of Angels. ✕

What exactly are you waiting for?

A common problem when I am coaching jiu-jitsu athletes is students second-guessing themselves when an opportunity presents itself during a match.

Too often, students are looking for the perfect situation from which to launch an attack. While I would never advocate sloppy setups or random attacks, I do caution students against waiting for the perfect moment for the simple reason that they rarely happen and are fleeting in nature.

As a general rule, once an opportunity arises, it rarely gets better by waiting. Usually, an intelligent opponent will become aware of his vulnerability and recover. Thus, the skill of **seeing opportunity and acting upon it immediately** is crucial to success.

The great American General Patton said it well: *"A good plan enacted now is better than a perfect plan enacted ten minutes from now."* Once you see an opening, follow it with action and be prepared to follow through to your goal. This almost always garners better results than waiting for a better opportunity that may never arise, forcing you to take greater risks as time runs out.

Here, kohai student **Eric Sherman** shows fine recognition of opportunity followed by decisive action in the opening moments of a bout at a local show in NYC.

Smallest competitor - biggest skill set and heart:

Garry Tonon walks around at 167 pounds and could easily make the EBI 145-pound division (he does not, as we like to see Eddie Cummings rule that domain). This Sunday, he will face athletes weighing in at 205 pounds, coming down from as much as 230-240 pounds for EBI 9. This might seem like a suicide mission—and for most, it would be. However, Mr. Tonon has a long history of going up against bigger opponents.

When he was a brown belt, he took on Buchecha and Cyborg at ADCC and only lost narrowly by points. He dominated most of the action against Rousimar Palhares in a thrilling draw, despite a colossal size and strength disadvantage. He lost by a negative guard pull to Vinny Magalhaes after pushing hard for submissions throughout the match. He has also beaten Ralek Gracie and Gilbert Burns by submission, despite significant size and strength disadvantages.

In all my coaching experience, I have not seen a grappling athlete with a bigger heart or a stronger desire to compete against anyone, at any time, any place. Rest assured, the squad may have had a setback today, but come Sunday, we shall come out all guns blazing!

Tomorrow, the senpai and kohai will train, drill, and get ready for this new challenge—one that represents the best spirit of jiu-jitsu: the belief that with superior technique and strategy, greater size and strength can be controlled and overwhelmed by the lesser.

Sad news:

Gordon Ryan suffered a nasty cut on his eyelid today during his last day of hard sparring in preparation for EBI 9. It has been tightly stitched and dressed, but there is no way he will be able to compete on Sunday. He will be replaced by Garry Tonon. Gordon was already the smallest man on the card, and Garry is a weight division below Mr. Ryan, so this will be a tough assignment indeed.

Mr. Tonon was himself cut during training in England, but his cut is much less severe and in a less sensitive area than Mr. Ryan's. He will be ready to go by Sunday. Both cuts were the result of training with people outside of our gym. There is always a catch here—it's good to train with unfamiliar partners as this is something you'll experience in competition; however, sometimes these strangers bring spastic and clumsy movement that can lead to small and unnecessary injuries like these. Thankfully, Gordon Ryan has other big upcoming projects to prepare for as soon as this problem passes, but still, the disappointment is strong. Mr. Tonon will commence training as soon as his own cut allows, and the show will go on.

Tomorrow I will chat with team mate Matt Serra on his UFC Unfiltered podcast.

Mr. Serra is Renzo Gracie's first American black belt and, of course, a BJJ world champion and former UFC welterweight champion. When I was a beginning student, Mr. Serra was one of Mr. Gracie's senior students (Ricardo Almeida and Rodrigo Gracie were the others). As such, he was my senpai (big brother/senior) and, as anyone who trained at RGA at that time will attest, an inspiration to all of us.

Much of my desire to improve in the sport came from daily training sessions with Mr. Serra, whose skills and abilities left us all in awe—wishing that one day we could attain such a level. Outside of jiu-jitsu and professional fighting, Matt is absolutely one of the funniest characters in the sport. He truly can light up a room when he enters. Best of all is when he has a target upon whom to aim that sense of humor.

Usually, it is the long-suffering Ray Longo, with whom he combines to create so many talented fighters on Long Island, NY. Tomorrow, however, it will be me!! , , Mr. Serra and I shall talk about old times in training, along with a host of random topics. If you feel like listening in, you will see what a character Mr. Serra is and perhaps learn a little about the approach to training that enabled Mr. Gracie to create such a large number of outstanding students in those early days of jiu-jitsu in the USA.

Next assignment:

After a great weekend in England, where Garry Tonon defeated two-time world champion Gilbert Burns via heel hook, it's back to NYC for four days of training to get Gordon Ryan ready for EBI 9 in Los Angeles, California. Mr. Ryan has been training diligently in the shadow of Mr. Tonon's big show at Polaris, but now takes center stage on the training mats for this heavyweight event, where he will be by far the smallest competitor. We are headed to Heathrow airport now, then back to the mats in NYC , , .

It was great to see the burgeoning BJJ scene in the UK and the rising success of a professional grappling league—Polaris. This bodes well for the future of British and European grappling.

One step forward - one step back:

Live training at the seminar today finished with a disappointment. Garry Tonon took a small but deep cut to the forehead during sparring. We are off to the local hospital now. Hoping to get some stitches in quickly, but it's going to be a while until Garry can train again, so his participation in the Worlds competition is in jeopardy at this point. We will have a better idea of the situation after we speak to the local doctors. Off to Birmingham hospital now, going over ashi garami at Braulio Estima's school in Birmingham, England.

The British lads and ladies are doing a good job following some complex material from myself, Garry Tonon, and Gordon Ryan. Mr. Tonon is doing a superb job of showing the tactics he used last night to defeat Gilbert Burns. Though I am very proud of all the squad's competition achievements, nothing makes me more proud than their ability to teach. That way, I feel very positive about the future growth of the sport, which is so much more important than mere individual achievement.

Gordon Ryan even agreed to take off his crown to teach—amazing! Thanks to @braulioestima and Garry and Gordon, and most of all, British BJJ, which appears healthy and full of enthusiasm.

Breakthrough!! Garry Tonon wins via his tokui waza, inverted heel hook from cross ashi garami, defeating two-time world champion and ADCC bronze medalist Gilbert Burns despite a major size and strength disadvantage at Polaris 4 in England tonight. It was an interesting match, with Mr. Burns scoring some nice takedowns and positional scrambles to pins, while Mr. Tonon employed an interesting strategy of recovery into a standing position to set up submissions.

About two-thirds of the way through the match, the strategy worked as Mr. Tonon locked out a very tight cross ashi garami and controlled it through to the finish against the very explosive and strong Mr. Burns. It was a good show overall. There was a fine match between 10th Planet standout Nathan Orchard, who countered the dangerous leg lock game of Japanese wizard Imanari with a solid traditional BJJ positional game through to a strangle.

Dillon Danis put on a superb performance, two fine-looking arm-in guillotines, one of which was unlucky not to get a finish, then a very well-applied inverted heel hook for a very nice win against highly decorated and larger opponent, Jackson Sousa. It was nice to see three such well-engineered submissions at such a high level against such talented opponents. Now we head back to NYC to prepare Gordon Ryan for EBI 9, where he will once again be the smallest man in the field—depending upon his technique and tactics as his lifeline to victory.

Size difference:

I always urge my students to see the main attribute of jiu jitsu training as the ability to control and defeat greater size and aggression with less. Often, the squad struggles to find opponents their own size to compete against. Very often, they have to fight opponents significantly larger than themselves as a result.

Today at the weigh-ins for Polaris 4, Garry Tonon weighed in at his actual bodyweight of 167.5 pounds, after eating a steak lunch. His opponent, Gilbert Burns, was supposed to weigh in at 170 pounds but failed to make weight by almost 10 pounds. He was so far over that he won't even try to make the weight, and once again, the squad will face a much larger opponent and rely on technique to prevail.

Nothing shows belief in our technique better than taking on much heavier opponents.

Structured training:

So often I see people engage in training with no plan as to what they are trying to accomplish. This will always limit your ability to improve over time — the whole reason why we engage in practice. It is critical that someone in the room have a clear idea as to what we are trying to improve and how we are going to do it.

In a beginner's class or a general class, it is enough for the coach to know what the plan is and run the class accordingly. At elite levels, however, I like to make the athletes part of the discussion as to what we are trying to achieve — they have the knowledge and insight to add to the discussion, and we can make adjustments based on their input.

Here, Garry Tonon, Gordon Ryan, and myself outline what we want to go over at a local gym in Poole, England, just prior to Polaris 4. Once the plan is set, words get replaced by action, and the room heats up accordingly.

An American werewolf in London:

AAfter-training dinner with Gordon Ryan and Garry Tonon is always an adventure. On the way back to the hotel, Gordon Ryan saw a pair of poles in the street and immediately went into street ninja mode, starting to climb them while screaming something about the memory of Harambe! I always dread seeing things like this before a match, fearing accidental injury — maybe I'm getting too old!

Anyway, after paying tribute to Harambe, Mr. Ryan climbed down safely in front of an admiring (or perhaps confused) crowd of curious English people and some not-so-admiring police officers. He then went to sleep, ready for another day of training.

Shiai preparation:

Garry Tonon and Gordon prepare for their upcoming respective competitions (shiai) in a local gym in England. the high humidity and cold create a steam room effect that made for an eerie but enjoyable mist - appropriate for England - the misty Isle that has given so much to world history. At this stage the training takes on the

same character as the final stages of sharpening a knife - the hard work has been done - now it's a matter of gently polishing the edge without removing any more metal - body movement and mental programming are the emphasis now, not physical conditioning or skill development. Mr Ryan's training is still physical as he still has a week before his event. Building the athlete to a peak over time is key here.

Newark airport:

Heading to England for Polaris 4 where Garry Tonon takes on the outstanding and physically very powerful Gilbert Burns in fifteen minutes of submission grappling action. Mr Tonon has trained extremely well. Fellow squad member Gordon Ryan is traveling with us also as he prepares for EBI 9, the heavyweight competition where he will be by far the smallest competitor - a situation that is becoming normal for the squad now. After we return Monday its a quick turn around to California for Mr Ryan's show. It's a privilege to be able to go to so many shows to exhibit our approach to grappling against such distinguished competition

Realistic combinations:

In the past, I have talked about the critical need for students to learn to combine submission attacks into short sequences to overcome resistance and break through to victory by submission. Just as no good boxer would expect to defeat a worthy opponent with single punches, so too, no jiu jitsu player would expect to defeat a worthy opponent every time with the first submission attempt.

One problem I often see, however, is people selecting inappropriate combinations. Sometimes these combinations look good when drilling with a non-resisting partner but fail in live sparring. The key is to select combinations that allow us to transition in a way that minimizes the distance we have to travel to get to the next attack while maximizing our control over our opponent's movement as they try to escape the first attack.

This creates very effective submission combinations that are difficult to avoid, even when resisting as hard as possible. Here, talented kohai student Matthew Tesla shows fine form at a recent local tournament with a well-selected combination leg

attack that offers his opponent little opportunity to avoid or counter the second attack — resulting in a nice submission win.

Creating rationally ordered, short submission combinations based on the criteria I just outlined will greatly increase your chances of success with the various submission holds we work with.

Staying relaxed:

Probably the single greatest obstacle to efficiency in human movement, in general, and jiu jitsu in particular, is **excess tension**. We all have a natural tendency to equate maximum effort with maximum muscular tension. In jiu jitsu, this often leads to poor movement and an inability to mold our bodies into the complex postures required to complete the various moves of the sport.

Don't get me wrong — there are times when we need tension in the body as we grapple. Finishing a submission is an obvious example, and certainly, we don't want to be so relaxed that we cannot form a tight connection to our opponent's body when needed. Nonetheless, as a general rule, we must train ourselves to avoid unnecessary tension that inhibits efficient movement.

Much of jiu jitsu requires us to fold, roll, and tumble our body, all of which is best done while in a fairly relaxed state. In any given match, there will be long periods where you can be very physically relaxed, along with many short periods where you can be fairly relaxed, and a few moments where you will need to be very tense and tight. Finding the right proportions of relaxation versus tension is a big part of the journey towards expertise.

Here, kohai student Emmanuel Vera shows an excellent degree of relaxed body movement, allowing fluid motion into cross ashi garami and a fine heel hook finish — where maximal tension is applied for a brief time. Very impressive for a blue belt, he went on to win gold via submission in the expert no-gi division at a recent tournament.

The lesson is simple — **we cannot use body type as an excuse for success or failure in any form of grappling sport.**

There is no link between championship success and body type. So often I am asked whether an athlete I coach is more successful with a given move or position due to his body type. For example, people will often say that Gordon Ryan's long, rangy body is the key to his strong back control. Yet they overlook the readily observable fact that Eddie Cummings, with an entirely different body type, also exhibits very strong back control — he just uses different methods.

The same can be said of Roger Gracie and Marcelo Garcia. Both were superb in attacking the back, but they have very different bodies and very different

methodologies. In truth, **there are so many different ways to achieve victory in our sport that no one body type can monopolize gold medals.**

There are sports where body types and attributes confer an advantage — basketball is an obvious example. There are only so many ways to get a ball in a net high above the average person's reach. But jiu jitsu is not like this. None of the major submission holds require any exceptional physical gifts, and the means of getting to them are limitless — so success is equal opportunity in jiu jitsu, and the winners' podium at the best-known competitions reflects this heartening fact.

Expertise:

When we think of expertise in jiu jitsu, we typically equate it with skill level on the mat — how good are you at performing the various moves and tactics of the sport and applying them against skilled opponents? It is important to realize, however, that expertise is a concept with many facets. One of the most crucial elements of expertise, and one that makes it easy to distinguish a beginner from an expert, is the ability of an expert to make **significant distinctions** between events and situations that the beginner simply does not see.

Most people are familiar with the often-used example of Alaskan natives (Inuit or Eskimo) and their vocabulary for "snow." Most people typically use the word "snow" to apply to any situation where white, powdery condensation falls from the sky in winter. For our purposes, one word, "snow," conveys enough information to get the job done. The Alaskan natives, however, live most of their lives in snow. They must be able to travel, hunt, fish, derive water, build shelter, etc., in snowy conditions.

As such, they need to be able to make fine-grained distinctions between different kinds of snowfall, as this can have very important consequences for their actions. Accordingly, they have a vast number of different words for "snow," each describing subtle but very important types of snow that I simply do not see or make. As such, they have an expert's view of snow, while I have a naïve beginner's view, and our respective vocabularies reveal that.

So too in jiu jitsu. When the squad talks about a given move like "**ashi garami**" together in training, we have a complex vocabulary to match each of the many subtle but important distinctions that will make the difference between success and failure when applying the move on a skilled opponent. Thus, we will talk about **irimi ashi garami, outside ashi garami, ushiro ashi garami**, etc., so that we can easily coach each other and indeed ourselves to make those subtle but important distinctions that demarcate success and failure.

So much of what we call expertise is exactly this — the ability to make fine-grained, but relevant distinctions, that others do not. Here, the squad works on **irimi ashi**

garami, an example of this depth of understanding. This ability to recognize and adjust to the finer details of movement, positioning, and timing is what truly sets the expert apart from the beginner.

Information overload:

When I first began coaching, I was anxious to pass as much detailed information as possible to students when demonstrating moves, believing that the more details they had, the more perfect their performance of the move would be. I soon found the opposite effect taking place. The students did not have the experience to know which details ought to be given priority, and so they tended to emphasize the least important details over the most important ones.

In addition, many students simply lost track of vast amounts of detail and ended up remembering nothing at all. Worst of all, I often saw students in live sparring desperately trying to recall information and hesitating when speed of action was required, much more than some additional detail. As I gained experience, I came to believe that it is quite counterproductive to throw vast amounts of detail at students, even advanced students, at one time.

The real value of a coach is not in dumping a ton of information, but in making good assessments about what the **critical details** are that a student needs to focus on in order to get the job done, not every minute detail underlying any given move. Further details can always be added at another time. The determining factor in whether the student will be successful in applying his or her knowledge in live sparring is not how much they know, but how much they can recall **under stress**. The truth is, none of us can recall very much under sufficiently stressful conditions.

My job, then, is not to overwhelm students with information—**it is to abbreviate and prioritize information**. Once I feel a student has absorbed the critical information in a way that they can actually utilize it under stress, then I can add more.

As soon as I made this adjustment, I noted increases in my students' actual mat performance, which, of course, is the most important element in my work. Coaches share much in common with editors—our most important role is to organize and arrange information in a way that benefits the student the most.

(Of course, there's considerable irony in me, a man infamous for writing some of the most long-winded and poorly edited posts in the history of Facebook and Instagram, trying to tell you these things! Maybe I should read my own posts...) Here, I've clearly gone into information overload with poor Gordon Ryan—perhaps I need to take my own advice!

The transfer of knowledge:

One of the greatest attributes we humans have is the ability to transfer knowledge from one person to another and from one generation to the next. It is this feature of our species that makes progress from one generation to another possible. If each generation had to start at the beginning of knowledge acquisition every time, there would be no progress—just repetition from one generation to the next. Only the fact that each generation can build upon the prior work of the previous generations, learning their lessons through language, makes progress over time possible. This principle also applies in jiu jitsu.

However outstanding the current crop of jiu jitsu athletes may be, I am confident that the following generations will be even better. They will benefit from the knowledge passed down to them by the current generation and will have the opportunity to build upon and improve it. Indeed, I would say that **my career as a coach would be an utter failure if I could not raise a class of students whose skill level was considerably higher than my own.** Anything less would mean I had failed to convey all that I knew and create students who absorbed it and had the initiative to improve upon it.

In this photo, I'm working with Gordon and Nicky Ryan on the mechanical tightness of their Achilles lock. When they go home for the evening, they'll continue working with each other, experimenting and researching, then testing it in live sparring over the next few weeks, making small modifications based on their own bodies and insights.

When I look at this photo, I smile because I can clearly see the **intergenerational growth** of the sport in a very positive and tangible way.

Guard passing in submission grappling:

Quite often I am asked whether I emphasize the skill of guard passing among my students. After all, in most of the tournaments in which my students compete, no points are awarded for passing an opponent's guard. Given that guard passing on a

talented opponent can be very hard work and that it scores nothing, and since my students are strong in leg attacks, many people ask, "Do you even bother with guard passing?" The answer is **absolutely yes**.

Indeed, visitors to the academy are often shocked at how much time we invest in guard passing skills—even when we are preparing for tournaments where we know it will score zero points. Even in this context, guard passing has great value, as it allows you to **attack the whole body**. The moment you start limiting your attacks to one part of your opponent's body, you become predictable, and defense for your opponent becomes easier. Our ideal is to attack the whole body—legs, arms, and neck. Guard passing makes upper body attacks possible. Without it, you would be limited to leg attacks—only 50% of your opponent's body.

So in training, we often look quite traditional in our constant practice of passing work. The only difference is our **motivation**. We are not motivated to pass guard for points, but by the ability to attack the upper body with submissions. Thus, we value guard passing as highly as anyone, just for slightly different reasons.

Here, Eddie Cummings does a good job of nullifying my guard attacks to work towards a stronger passing position during training before an EBI event, where, ironically, he knows that guard passing will bring no points reward.

A theory of pinning:

Most people think of pinning (osaekomi) as the act of displaying control by immobilizing an opponent. This certainly demonstrates control and is a very useful skill in combat. However, when one makes **submission** his primary goal, total immobilization of an opponent is not necessarily desirable. The act of totally immobilizing an opponent usually results in totally immobilizing ourselves as well. As a result, we are unable to make the transition to submission holds.

The goal of the submission hunter is thus not static pins, but **directional pins**. These are pins that control the opponent in a way where he can only move in predictable ways that we control and determine. This allows us to anticipate his movement and take advantage of the inevitable extension of his body as he moves, enabling us to shift from a pin controlling the torso to a submission hold attacking a limb. Static situations rarely give opportunities for submission.

As a general rule: **where there is movement, there is opportunity for submission**. Thus, directional pinning, rather than static pinning, is the focus of those who favor submission over all else.

Here, I work the theory of directional pinning with the immensely talented Mikey Wilson, the youngest member of the squad, who at age ten displays a maturity and talent that astounds me.

Pre-contact:

Due to the very nature of grappling, which requires us to have some form of grip upon our opponent in order to be able to work the moves, most people have a tendency to underestimate the importance of skills utilized prior to establishing our grips. It is very important to understand that the game begins **before either athlete has laid a finger upon the other**. As the two athletes approach each other, they should be working to gain an advantage **before a grip has even been taken**.

This can be done through **stance, movement, angle, level, and limb positioning**. Subtle use of these factors as we approach an opponent prior to making grips can result in an advantage that will give us the initiative as we enter the grappling engagement. Good athletes don't wait until they establish contact to begin the fight for advantage—they begin as soon as they approach an opponent so that by the time contact has been made, they are already a step ahead. Then, it's a battle to keep moving from advantage to advantage until victory.

As in most areas of life, **he who begins with advantage generally has an easier time in a competitive setting**—jiu jitsu is no exception to this general rule. Here, Nicky Ryan has begun maneuvering to advantage with hands, feet, and stance **before contact has even been made** in his superfight in Canada yesterday. The small advantages he was able to gain prior to contact translated into bigger advantages as the match progressed, until he secured his victory via heel hook.

Winners podium:

Young Nicky Ryan, just **fifteen years of age**, traveled all the way to Canada after a solid camp with the squad and competed today in a superfight against local adult (31 years old) grappling standout **Danny An Khoi Vu**. Nicky won via submission with a **heel hook variation** in around **two minutes**. At the same tournament, **Oliver Taza** entered a tournament format and defeated multiple opponents all via **heel hook** to win **gold**.

Here are the two junior squad members enjoying victory at the **Submission Series Pro** event. We're looking forward to seeing them back in the gym as they help the squad prepare for more upcoming challenges in the near future.

Proposed changes:

Mr. **Eddie Bravo**, founder and chairman of **EBI** (one of the most successful and fastest-growing grappling competition organizations), is proposing some radical changes to the show's format that would essentially take it out of the traditional grappling competition business and put it somewhere between **grappling** and **MMA**. The idea is to allow limited striking on the ground via **palm strikes** as a means of bridging the gap between grappling and MMA.

This is certainly an interesting concept. It could potentially address a common criticism of submission-only formats — that they allow athletes to take positions and make moves that would get them severely hurt in a real fight. Additionally, it might encourage athletes to play a more **traditional positional game**, as they would be rewarded with the opportunity to set up submissions with **flurries of palm strikes** from dominant positions.

I spent much of the first part of my coaching career developing **grappling boxing systems** for MMA fighters, but striking with the palm only is a very different game. From a coaching perspective, this could be quite interesting.

The main danger of the proposal is that it might scare off high-level grapplers who don't want to be part of what they may perceive as a **crazy slap grappling** event that will be quite different from their usual competition training. There's also the risk that it may end up looking like a mix of weak striking and weak grappling, which could fail to satisfy both the **MMA crowd** and the **grappling crowd**.

Practical difficulties are also a concern — how would injuries such as cuts or broken noses be handled in a tournament where athletes may have to fight multiple times in an evening? How this will all work out is anyone's guess, but as they say, **there is only one way to find out**. The only certainty is that, as always, **training, adaptation, and strategy** will determine the winners.

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Changes over time:

Ideally, you should view jiu jitsu as a lifetime activity. Of course, there will be times when you need to train less, or perhaps not at all — life is complicated and uncertain, and sometimes our jiu jitsu training will reflect that. However, the beauty of it is that you can always return and resume your journey.

An interesting aspect of lifetime training is the changes that occur naturally to our game over time. Sometimes these changes happen rapidly, other times they are barely perceptible, even to ourselves.

Some changes occur due to shifts in priorities. When my sensei, Renzo Gracie, first came to New York City and began teaching, his bottom game was based around tomoe-nage sweeps from open guard and lapel and Ezekiel (sode guruma) strangles. However, when he began his professional fighting career and started competing in no-gi ADCC grappling, he had to drastically change his bottom game to incorporate hook sweeps (Sumi gaeshi) and guillotine strangles.

Other changes are often the result of changes in our bodies, typically due to age or the wear and tear of training. Regardless of the reason, I always see change over time as a healthy thing. There's more to jiu jitsu than just victory over an opponent. Much of its value lies in self-expression, self-knowledge, and enjoyment. All of these are enhanced by variation and change in our game.

If we only focused on the moves most likely to generate a win, the game would soon lose its appeal. It would become monotonous and boring, and we would experience no growth over time. But when we experiment and move in new directions, we may initially lose some combat effectiveness (though I am confident that in most cases, you will eventually increase your effectiveness by having a wider repertoire of attacks), but we gain so much more.

One of my favorite examples of change over time is the evolution of my friend and coach, Matt Serra.

When he first began as a standout grappler at the Renzo Gracie Academy, his game was based on open guard work combined with lightning-fast heists to guillotine strangles or rear strangles. After a long MMA career and half a lifetime of changes, his game now is completely different—almost unrecognizable—focused on top pressure passing and kimura attacks. Yet, his new game is just as effective as the one that initially made him a world champion and ADCC champion.

This progression highlights the dynamic, evolving nature of jiu jitsu and how we grow in the sport throughout our lives.

Reflections on my sensei:

A massive part of our experience in life is shaped by our teachers. While we may forget most of our childhood school experiences, we tend to remember almost all our teachers. The same holds true in martial arts. Our senseis are likely the single biggest influence on the direction we take in the sport.

Whenever a group of grapplers gets together, it doesn't take long before the discussion turns to our senseis, and the stories flow like rivers. Like most people, fortune has thrown me a mixed bag of blessings and curses throughout my life, but one area where I have been consistently fortunate is in the people who became my teachers, whether in academics or martial arts.

Although my writings mostly focus on new directions in grappling, they would be incomplete if they didn't include stories of my sensei, **Renzo Gracie**, who took me in as a white belt with a crippled leg in **New York City** in the mid-1990s and guided me on my journey through the sport. I believe it's impossible for any one person to provide a complete education in any field. Therefore, I believe everyone should have auxiliary senseis who offer alternative perspectives and new directions. However, it's also important to find a primary sensei who provides the majority of your outlook and gives you a unified direction. I was lucky to find mine on the first try, but I suspect this is not the case for most people.

The lessons I learned during my **twenty years of training and teaching at Renzo Gracie's gym** can't be summarized in a single Facebook post, so I will return to this topic multiple times. Each time, I'll aim to share a lesson or idea from Renzo that I hope will improve your experience in the sport, just as it did mine.

One student once asked me, "What was the single biggest influence that Mr. Gracie had on your direction in jiu jitsu?" My answer was this: **Renzo Gracie created a school that was built around three critically important themes:**

1. **Results Over Tradition**
2. **Liberality in Direction**
3. **Happiness Must Be Linked to Jiu Jitsu and Jiu Jitsu to Happiness**

Let's break each of these down:

1. Results Over Tradition
Renzo's primary concern was always **combat effectiveness**. He focused on this like a laser and let nothing stand in its way. If something worked, it was adopted, regardless of its origin. As soon as a new idea emerged and showed promise, it was subjected to rigorous testing in sparring. If it passed the test, it was adopted into the curriculum. I remember the night I came up with the inverted **kata gatame strangle** (which later became known as the **D'Arce choke**, named after one of my students, Joe D'Arce).

I had just received my **blue belt** two weeks earlier and nervously approached Renzo, along with my training partner and friend, **Shawn Williams**, to ask if he thought it was worth investigating. Renzo had just returned from a victorious fight in Japan and was on top of the martial arts world. It would have been easy for him to dismiss the ideas of a "gringo blue belt," but he didn't. He asked to see it, then to feel it, and eventually, he tried it out. That night in sparring, both of us tapped out training partners with it — no one had seen it before, and there was no defense for it at the time. The very next night, Renzo taught it in class, in the same manner as any traditional technique.

2. Liberality in Direction

Renzo was extremely liberal as a teacher. You can see this in his senior students. If you look at Renzo's top students, you'll notice they have very different games and approaches to the sport. Renzo only demanded **effectiveness**, which left a huge amount of freedom for us to develop our own styles. For instance, when I told Renzo I was interested in developing a **leg lock system** (in the 1990s, when leg locks were seen as the tools of cowards and idiots), he simply said, "Good, let me know what you come up with!"

3. Happiness Must Be Linked to Jiu Jitsu and Jiu Jitsu to Happiness

The third aspect, which is often overlooked, has become one of the most important lessons I've learned as I've grown older. Renzo made training a **source of happiness**. Often, we get caught up in results, desires, goals, and perfectionism, losing sight of the most important demand — that our journey be joyful and fulfilling. If training isn't fun, you won't last through the hardships, the grind, and the years.

As anyone who has met Renzo can attest, he has an incredible ability to light up a room and make everyone feel comfortable and welcome, even in the uptight and fast-paced atmosphere of New York City. Every week, I see numerous students who come to the academy when they can't train, just to hang out and be part of something that brings them joy. As much as I talk about improving sports performance in my writings, this must always be placed in the context of a happy and fulfilling life. Otherwise, even the most disciplined student will eventually look for something else to do.

No one and no school is perfect, but basing his approach on these three themes made **Renzo Gracie** one of the most influential and successful martial arts teachers of his generation. I will always be grateful to have been a product of his teachings.

The importance of tokui-waza:

The Japanese grappling tradition offers much wisdom, and one core concept that stands out is tokui-waza, which translates to "favorite technique." In grappling, just as in many other areas of life, every athlete naturally gravitates toward certain techniques that they become particularly adept at. These techniques often align with one's personality and body type, but other factors can play a role in shaping them as well.

Tokui waza are incredibly important for technical growth in the sport. The moment a beginner develops their first tokui waza, I know they're on the right path. In a grappler's journey, the first tokui waza plays a similar role to major milestones in life — much like getting your first car, first job, or first apartment. It represents a critical first step towards grappling maturity. Once you have a favorite move, you can start adding variations, combinations, and counters to your opponent's counters.

Tokui waza is more than just a favored way to win matches. It functions as a catalyst for further technical growth and progress. The acquisition of even one tokui waza often accelerates a grappler's development more than a series of generalized lessons. Over time, it is essential to develop more tokui waza. However, the number is not as crucial as the depth of mastery within them.

The goal is not to have a broad array of techniques, but to develop such deep knowledge and skill in a smaller set of moves that once you enter that particular domain, your opponents cannot match your expertise in that area. You can then overwhelm them and take the victory from there.

Interestingly, Eddie Cummings is a perfect example of this concept. His tokui-waza is known to be leg locks, but when I first met him, his favorite technique was the guillotine choke. This shows that a grappler's initial tokui waza doesn't always remain their final or most mature one. Even as time passes and techniques evolve, the concept of tokui waza remains essential in the development of a deeply skilled and versatile grappler.

Shared vision:

When you dedicate every thought and action to a singular guiding principle — **"jiu jitsu is the art and science of control that leads to submission"** — you gain the necessary focus to transform the jiu jitsu world. This focus is what enables athletes to achieve greatness, combining knowledge, skill, discipline, and tactics with a clear direction and vision.

Gordon Ryan's performance in the finals of **EBI 8** is a prime example of this philosophy in action. With near-perfect form, he secured a **heel hook variation** that earned him the gold medal over the incredibly tough and talented **Kyle Griffen**. Kyle himself had been involved in some epic battles throughout the event, but in the final, Gordon's preparation and mastery of the fundamentals prevailed.

Watching Gordon's success from the corner, alongside his great mentor and friend, **Garry Tonon**, his younger brother **Nicky Ryan**, and myself, was truly a thrill. Now, the four of us are focused on helping Garry prepare for his upcoming bouts in Florida. As we continue training and refining our approach to jiu jitsu, the vision of control leading to submission remains at the heart of everything we do. I hope you all enjoyed the show and continue to gain insights into the tactics, techniques, and philosophy behind our approach to the sport.

The return of the King:

Expectations were high for **Gordon Ryan's** return to **EBI 8**, and he did not disappoint. Gordon submitted all four of his opponents, with one of the victories coming in overtime, securing the gold medal. It was a particularly fascinating tournament for Gordon, as several athletes who had previously defeated him in his younger years were in the competition. Despite this, Gordon was unstoppable, showcasing excellent entries and finishes into submission holds.

His performance was a perfect demonstration of the core vision of **jiu jitsu** that we hold — **control that leads to submission**. His technical precision and dominance throughout the event illustrated the depth of his training and his ability to execute our approach to the sport.

Additionally, **Eddie Bravo** continues to deliver an exciting and innovative show, promoting a new and evolving vision of grappling. His commitment to pushing the boundaries of the sport ensures that events like EBI continue to captivate and inspire both athletes and fans alike.

Last NYC training sessions:

As **Gordon Ryan** continues his training for **EBI 8** in Los Angeles, he is joined by his brother **Nicky** and **Garry Tonon**, while **Oliver Taza** works with Garry in the final build-up. The focus of their drills is on **positional pressure**, an essential component in creating the right conditions where submissions naturally become available. These drills are crucial in simulating the intensity of matches while

minimizing the risk of injury, especially as competition draws near and athletes are more susceptible to harm.

EBI 8 promises to be a thrilling event, featuring a group of talented athletes, some of whom have posed significant challenges to Gordon in the past. This will serve as an excellent measure of Gordon's progress and the effectiveness of the training program since his last encounters with these competitors.

Following the event, **Gordon** will face off against opponents in a new weight class of **185 pounds**. Afterward, the focus will shift to a trip to **Australia**, where Gordon will reconnect with family for the first time since his hip replacement surgery. His visit will also include some lighter-hearted seminars in **Sydney** and **Melbourne**, with topics humorously titled: "**No Gi Butterfly Guard vs Saltwater Crocodile Attack**", "**Spider Guard vs Great White Shark**", and "**Half Guard Sweeps vs Combined Taipan Snake and Box Jellyfish Attack**". These seminars promise to be both informative and entertaining as Gordon enjoys some downtime in Australia!

Getting the gang back together:

Big projects coming up with the challenges of multiple EBI's, special rule sets (for Garry Tonon in Florida in two weeks) and high profile superfight a for Eddie Cummings (vs Geo Martinez) and Gordon Ryan who has just been matched against the great Claudio Callasans, current ADCC world champion and a very dangerous and skilled adversary. With all these great challenges, training is getting very interesting indeed. Here, the squad relaxes after another structured session designed to build the skills needed to prevail in the face of these big challenges.

Give me a lever long enough and I shall move the world:

Chris Weidman and Gordon Ryan experiment with lever and fulcrum together. We work in a sport that is largely mechanical in nature. Learning to impose mechanical advantage on to a resisting opponent is our obsession. Ultimately you do not defeat your opponent - the laws of physics do it through your body. Look at jiu jitsu through the prism of physics and mechanics and a whole new world will emerge before your eyes and you will never see the game in the same fashion again.

Adapting to the rules:

The highest form of grappler is one who can win under any rule set. Such a man is not yet in existence, but perhaps one day he will emerge. In the meantime it is fun to see students adapt to different rule sets and apply their technique accordingly. Here, Oliver Taza competes in an IBJJF tournament and makes the necessary adjustments to secure an impressive win.

When the match is over:

The key to consistent success in any sport, including jiu-jitsu, lies in the ability to critically analyze both **victories and defeats**. While it's common for athletes to focus primarily on their losses as learning opportunities, it's just as important to examine wins in the same way. A truthful analysis of a match often reveals that a victory could have easily been a loss if only a few things had been different.

This realization is empowering when you lose, as it shows you areas for improvement, but it can also be concerning when you win. The difference between a one-time win and repeated success is in how you evaluate your performance—identifying both your strengths and weaknesses and taking concrete steps to enhance your game. **Nicky Ryan**, even after winning a **gold medal**, demonstrates this mindset perfectly. Despite his victory, he still reflects on areas he could improve. This ability to self-reflect and seek continuous growth is a huge part of his success and points to a bright future in the sport.

By developing the habit of analyzing each performance—whether it's a win or a loss—athletes set themselves up for long-term improvement and create the conditions for victory to become a consistent part of their journey. This attitude, as seen in Nicky, helps ensure steady progress and ultimately leads to greater success over time.

Contingency plans:

In combat sports, including jiu-jitsu, one of the few guarantees is that things will go wrong at some point. When they do, it's often unexpected and happens quickly. This makes it absolutely crucial to have **contingency plans** in place to handle difficult situations. In fact, a significant portion of achieving victory in combat comes down to **not losing**. You need to be able to recover from moments when things

aren't going your way, regroup, and find your path back to control and ultimately to victory.

Having a clear defensive strategy and the confidence to execute it allows you to take more risks offensively, knowing that if things go wrong, you can rely on your defense to recover. **Gordon Ryan**, as shown in his warm-up before a bout, emphasizes the importance of these defensive contingency plans. While much attention is often paid to his **offensive techniques** and victories, it's his belief in his defensive skills that forms the solid foundation for his success. His ability to remain calm and composed, even in potentially perilous situations, allows him to stay confident and perform at his best.

This emphasis on **composure** is echoed in the way athletes like **Nicky Ryan** approach competition. At just 15 years old, Nicky shows remarkable maturity, reflecting a deep understanding of the technical aspects of jiu-jitsu, and the ability to keep his emotions in check, even in high-pressure moments. This calmness is not only a testament to his mental strength but also crucial in problem-solving during a match. Success in jiu-jitsu, and in any combat sport, comes from **technical solutions** rather than emotional reactions. A clear mind allows you to think critically and find the right move, even when faced with adversity.

In jiu-jitsu, as in life, being able to recover from mistakes, stay calm under pressure, and trust your defense allows you to maintain control and keep moving forward, turning difficult moments into opportunities for success.

Getting the little things right:

In jiu-jitsu and other combat sports, the smallest errors can lead to significant consequences. These tiny mistakes, often overlooked in training, can quickly snowball into missed opportunities or, worse, a loss. As a competitor, it's easy to get comfortable with the level of competence you have in a move or technique, but it's important to remember that complacency can become a trap. One day, that seemingly adequate level of skill may fall short in a critical moment, costing you the match.

This is why attention to detail and the continuous refinement of techniques are so crucial in the pursuit of mastery. Champions aren't defined by simply knowing the basics—they are distinguished by their discipline in learning the nuances and deeper aspects of every movement. As the example of Georges St-Pierre demonstrates, even when an athlete has achieved a certain level of competency in a technique like *ashi garami*, there's always room for deeper exploration and

improvement. St-Pierre, known for his relentless pursuit of perfection, continues to refine his attacks, constantly searching for new angles and strategies.

This mindset is key to greatness. No matter how skilled you become, there is always something more to learn. As demonstrated by the playful but insightful interaction with Carl Massaro, the quest for improvement is never-ending. In jiu-jitsu, it's not just about what you already know, but about constantly evolving your understanding and execution of techniques. And sometimes, that means pushing yourself into unfamiliar areas or revisiting moves you thought you had mastered.

The story about the IBJJF rules joke highlights how these world-class athletes are always up for a challenge. Even when faced with limits or restrictions (like the usual IBJJF rules), their response isn't frustration or resistance but rather a drive to adapt and continue learning. The playful jab from Eddie Cummings, who took the rules in stride with humor, emphasizes that true champions approach their training with an open mind and a willingness to learn—even from the most unexpected situations.

In jiu-jitsu, every detail matters, and the journey to mastery is continuous. Even when you think you've "mastered" something, it's important to keep digging deeper, refining your technique, and staying humble enough to learn from every situation, whether it's a win, a loss, or a simple training session.

Controlled aggression:

The ultimate goal in any combat situation is **victory**, and that victory often requires some form of aggression. Whether it's through **physical harm** or the **threat of harm**, to win, we must take action that overwhelms our opponent. However, **aggression** alone is not enough. For beginners, the expression of aggression is often naive, disorganized, and ineffective.

If you watch any untrained street fight, the lack of technique is glaring. The fighters may be aggressive, but their movements are unrefined, leading to a chaotic display full of **missed opportunities** and **avoidable mistakes**. True combat effectiveness requires channeling this aggression through **technique** and **strategy**, which can only be achieved with **discipline** and **self-control**. The mental aspect of combat—maintaining focus on technique, timing, and the bigger picture—becomes just as important as physical strength.

This is why **live sparring** is the foundation of effective training. **Sparring** allows athletes to test their aggression, skills, and mental composure under real conditions, with the pressure and intensity of actual combat. It's not enough to simply know the techniques; we must learn how to apply them with precision and control when the stakes are high.

In the example of **Nicky Ryan**, the key takeaway is the **mental composure** that allows him to perform complex techniques—such as the heel hook variation—under the stress of a tough match. Despite the chaos of a live, high-stakes sparring session, Ryan is able to focus solely on the **mechanical details** and execute the move efficiently. His lack of visible emotion and his calm, **calculated decision-making** show how **discipline** in the mental game is just as vital as physical skill.

Similarly, **Chris Weidman** exemplifies the importance of **quick, decisive action** once a plan is in place. He shows a keen sense of **opportunity**, a hallmark of champions. When he decides to act, he does so with precision, leaving little room for hesitation. His ability to execute moves like **positional control** and **strangulation** techniques stems from years of refining his mental and physical training, enabling him to execute them efficiently in both training and competition.

In summary, the key to **victory** is a **methodical approach** where aggression is tempered with **self-control**, refined technique, and **mental composure**. Champions like Nicky Ryan and Chris Weidman showcase how discipline and preparation allow fighters to remain focused and effective under pressure, turning aggression into a precise and calculated tool for success.

Training vs fighting:

One of the most admirable qualities of **UFC champions Georges St-Pierre** and **Chris Weidman** is their approach to training. Despite being known for their dominant wrestling and takedown abilities, both champions consistently choose to **pull guard** at the start of sparring sessions and work from the **bottom position**. This is noteworthy because, given their skill set, they could easily take down everyone in the room and dominate from top position. However, their decision to engage in a more challenging and uncomfortable position reflects a **humble** and **growth-oriented mindset**.

The reasoning behind this is simple but powerful: they recognize the importance of **submission grappling** as a crucial skill in their overall MMA development. By putting themselves in a position where they are more vulnerable, they are forced to refine their **bottom game** and **submission defense**—skills that are vital in MMA, even though it may make their training more difficult. Their willingness to struggle and face adversity in training mirrors the kind of **growth mindset** that top athletes possess.

This approach is key to their continuous improvement. While their takedown game is strong, they seek out **specialists** in takedowns for focused training at other locations. They understand that training with specialists in a given area—whether it be grappling, submissions, or takedowns—helps them **improve holistically** as mixed martial artists. By regularly stepping into a room with **submission grapplers** and testing their skills, they avoid the trap of only training in their areas of comfort. In turn, this keeps their development **well-rounded** and helps them stay ahead in an ever-evolving sport.

Their ability to **embrace challenges** and **push themselves beyond their comfort zones** is what sets them apart from many other fighters who may avoid their weaknesses in training. Even when working in specialized areas that are not their strength, both St-Pierre and Weidman still manage to give **specialists** a tough time, showing just how far they have come in their martial arts journey.

In this example, St-Pierre works on his **bottom position** with **Robson Gracie**, focusing on refining his skills. This willingness to work on weaknesses and engage in difficult situations is a mindset that not only improves their overall game but also sets a **gold standard** for how to approach training with humility and the goal of constant improvement.

Nicky Ryan - Locked out!

Nicky Ryan - just 15 years old - went to Gracie Nationals to compete in men's adult black belt division. Apparently Mr Eddie Bravo offered a chance to fight under EBI rules against the older 10th Planet prodigy Derek Rayfield in an impromptu superfight. Mr Ryan immediately accepted. He attacked with a mix of submissions and position before settling on a heel hook variation that won a submission victory in short order. This young man has trained so hard - it is wonderful to see him rewarded with victory today .

Carrying the flag:

Demian Maia is a fascinating and rare figure in modern MMA for his commitment to a pure jiu jitsu-based strategy. While most fighters use Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) as just one of many tools in their toolkit, Maia embodies an approach that focuses almost exclusively on jiu jitsu, particularly the classical, position-based approach. His fights often follow a classic BJJ progression: he seeks the takedown, controls his opponent through positional advances, and moves with precision toward submission. If he finds himself in a bottom position, his options are strategic—he works to recover guard, looks for sweeps, seeks submissions, or sets up for another takedown.

This commitment to traditional BJJ principles is remarkable because of its simplicity and effectiveness at an elite level, especially in a sport that heavily favors well-rounded athletes. In Maia's case, it shows the potential depth of mastery one can achieve within a single martial art when it's taken to its purest form. What makes his success even more impressive is his ability to stay competitive as he ages; even at 38—a time when many fighters start considering retirement—Maia continues to

hone his jiu jitsu game, showing marked improvements with each fight. Moving to a lower weight class also allowed him to refocus on jiu jitsu fundamentals, avoiding the distractions that kickboxing initially introduced into his game.

Training Chris Weidman for his fight against Maia was, by all accounts, one of the most interesting coaching experiences. At the time, Maia was experimenting with striking, which allowed Weidman's jiu jitsu and wrestling base to counter effectively. But since that time, Maia's skills have matured greatly. By doubling down on his BJJ, Maia has reached a level of positional and technical excellence that makes him one of the most formidable grapplers in the cage.

Despite not adopting the trash-talking or brawling style popular among many fighters, Maia's fights embody a martial ideal of control, precision, and respect. His success in achieving "bloodless victories" in a violent sport is a testament to the efficacy of jiu jitsu when practiced with such dedication. For fans of martial arts, his fights are a unique experience, a glimpse into what jiu jitsu can look like in its purest competitive form.

As he prepares to face a striker like Carlos Condit, Maia's fans can appreciate that regardless of the outcome, Maia will continue to represent the ideals of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. In a sport that has evolved toward well-roundedness and hybrid styles, Maia stands as a lone flag bearer for jiu jitsu specialists, reminding the world of the art's powerful legacy in MMA.

Grapple Boxing:

Teaching "grapple boxing"—the refined art of merging grappling and striking on the ground—is one of the most specialized and nuanced skills in MMA coaching. This concept goes beyond the basic "ground and pound" terminology, which is often used to describe the way MMA fighters strike from a dominant ground position. Unlike the "ground and pound" approach, grapple boxing recognizes that both the athlete in the top and bottom positions can deploy strikes effectively. This technique-driven approach requires a high degree of skill and strategy, not the brute force often implied by "pounding."

Grapple boxing was developed as MMA transitioned from a single-discipline format into a complex sport requiring **multi-faceted skill sets**. This evolution demanded techniques that allow athletes to move seamlessly between striking and grappling, adapting instantly as they transition between ground and stand-up exchanges. For top-level athletes like Georges St-Pierre and Chris Weidman, grapple boxing became a tool to control opponents, set up submissions, or inflict quick and precise damage, all while maintaining positional awareness and avoiding risky counters. Both fighters excelled at this dynamic skill, using it to tremendous effect in the octagon.

The rise of grapple boxing in modern MMA even has echoes of **Ancient Greek Pankration**, where fighters combined striking and grappling to great effect. Bringing these techniques back into a structured, strategic form is not only a testament to the sport's evolution but also a fascinating revival of combat arts that had largely disappeared for centuries. Georges St-Pierre, for example, showed extraordinary composure and skill in his bout with Carlos Condit, both defensively and offensively, demonstrating a mastery of grapple boxing in real time.

The chance to help pioneer this art of controlled aggression has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my coaching career. Seeing athletes like St-Pierre and Weidman embrace and excel in grapple boxing, using it to set themselves apart in MMA, reinforces the depth of technical evolution happening in the sport today.

All limbs working in unity:

When beginners come to jiu jitsu, they grapple primarily with their arms. As they gain in skill, they learn to grapple with their legs. Mastery however, will only come when they come to use their arms and legs in unison. Your legs provide the horsepower to your bottom game, your arms (through grips) provide the ability to apply that horse in meaningful ways to your opponent.

Think of your legs as the engine, your arms as the transmission that allows you to apply that power to your opponents body. Here Eddie Cummings show fine unity of purpose between upper and lower body work - legs and arms working in unison to destabilize his opponent in directs that will set up his attacks

Misunderstandings:

There's often a misconception that I emphasize leg locks as the pinnacle of jiu jitsu. It's understandable why people might think this, given that leg locks are a visible and unique aspect of my students' competition strategy, setting them apart from many others. However, this is only part of the picture.

My primary focus as a coach has been to address a gap I saw in traditional jiu jitsu— a lack of comprehensive lower-body submission systems. Strengthening this area has been an essential step in making our game more well-rounded and robust. But while developing a systematic approach to leg locks has been a significant part of my work, it doesn't represent my full vision for jiu jitsu.

My true ideal in jiu jitsu is broader: **the ability to attack the entire body effectively**—legs, arms, and neck—with equal proficiency. This full-spectrum

approach ensures that the athlete is a well-rounded threat. If I have any preference among submission types, it would be for strangleholds (*shime waza*) over joint locks (*kansetsu waza*), as strangles are often more decisive. But ultimately, the goal is versatility.

Our training aims to cultivate athletes who can fluidly transition from one form of attack to another. Visitors to our sessions sometimes expect an emphasis on leg locks, yet they're often surprised when they're confronted with a series of arm locks, strangles, and, of course, leg locks. The strategy is to create a style of jiu jitsu that attacks the opponent's whole body, making it far more challenging to defend.

This ideal was on full display when Garry Tonon fought Ralek Gracie, transitioning smoothly from a strangle attempt to an armlock and finishing with a leg lock. His performance captured the essence of a complete submission game, a hallmark of our approach. By building this comprehensive skill set, we create a jiu jitsu that is both unpredictable and effective—a constant and balanced threat to every part of the opponent's body.

Intensity levels:

The question of intensity in daily training is one of balance. In jiu jitsu, our ultimate aim is to develop control over opponents who may be larger, stronger, and fighting at their peak intensity. Naturally, this means that some sessions must involve high-intensity sparring where we push our physical and technical limits, preparing for the reality of competition. However, training constantly at maximum intensity can backfire in two major ways: it can lead to more frequent injuries, and it often restricts athletes to their most trusted moves, their *tokui waza*, in order to survive these tough sessions. Over time, this can stifle growth, as it limits the skill set to what already feels comfortable and effective under pressure.

On the other hand, if we avoid intensity entirely—never sparring or only engaging in very light training—another problem arises. Without experiencing the application of techniques at full force, athletes can struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into practical use under the intensity of competition. A purely soft approach also misses the critical connection between technique and physicality, making it difficult to develop the necessary strength and timing that come from practicing moves under real resistance.

The solution lies in a balance that varies for each individual but aims for both progress and preservation. Training should alternate between lower-intensity sessions for developing new skills, exploring techniques outside of our comfort zones, and high-intensity sparring that pressures us to sharpen and solidify those skills. Monitoring personal progress and injury levels over time is essential to adjusting this balance.

For example, when an athlete like Jake Shields is preparing for a match, he trains with high physicality against skilled opponents like Gordon Ryan to simulate competitive conditions. Yet, when Shields takes a break from competition, he might focus on sparring with blue belts or experimenting with new techniques to broaden his skill set. This balance allows athletes to build a comprehensive and adaptable game, reducing the risks of injury while fostering technical growth.

Finding the right intensity is a continuous adjustment, but with thoughtful programming, it becomes a powerful tool for steady, long-term development in jiu jitsu.

Uchi Mata!

Uchi mata—the inner thigh throw—will always be one of the most versatile and high-percentage upper body throws. It has many applications both with and without the gi. It is equally useful as a proactive attacking throw and as a reactive counter to takedowns. Some moves in our sport are so fundamental that it's difficult to succeed without having them in your arsenal.

Uchi mata is a prime example. All jiu jitsu students should be familiar with it and able to apply it. Students must discern the truly essential movements of the sport and use these as the foundation of their game. On top of that foundation, they can add their own favorites to give their game individuality and personality, but the essentials cannot be passed over. Here, Garry Tonon launches grappling standout Dillon Danis with a well-applied uchi mata at the ADCC World Grappling Championships.

The best proposal for advancing submission grappling , in my opinion, is that of Mr Eddie Bravo.

His format offers a long enough time (10 minutes) to provide a real chance for submission in regulation time, along with an overtime period that forces contestants to demonstrate submission skills (rather than takedowns or positional skills). This motivates them to focus on submission during regulation, since they will inevitably have to deal with it in overtime anyway.

Of course, it is possible to stall until regulation time is over and then attempt to win via riding time in the overtime period. However, you will at least have to

demonstrate submission defense if you take this route. Additionally, if someone uses such a strategy against you, you will get at least three good submission shots at him before the bout is over. The fact that it forces a winner and loser in every bout appeals to the casual fan and enhances overall spectator appeal.

While no rule set will appeal to everyone, this one is the best for growing the sport through viewership while remaining as true as possible to the soul of our art—the ability to control someone in ways that lead to submission. Ultimately, however, we need a range of rule sets to keep the sport healthy. Our sport has many different facets, and no single rule set can cover them all satisfactorily. I think the EBI rule set is best for growing the sport of submission grappling through televised events.

I believe standard IBJJF and ADCC rules are very good for maintaining the positional game of jiu-jitsu and for keeping a strong emphasis on strangleholds as the preferred method of submission in the sport. These rules also work well for large-scale tournaments involving hundreds of people of all ages and skill levels, where safety is a concern.

No-time-limit, submission-only matches are good for isolated superfights when purity of submission skill is the main focus.

Between all of these rule sets, the sport can remain healthy. Looking for one standardized rule set will inevitably weaken the sport in some areas. Obviously, we don't want a vast number of rule sets, but a small list of around five different rule structures can cover the main areas of the sport and ensure that all skills within the sport remain strong among the athletes who participate in it.

New tricks:

I always enjoy a coaching challenge. When Jake Shields came to NYC prior to his fight with Rousimar Palhares—the most feared leg locker in MMA—he asked if I could help him defend against the leg lock game. It seemed like a difficult assignment, as Mr. Shields struggled in his initial sessions to defend moves that he had no training in. I told Mr. Shields that the only way to defend them was to learn the entire leg lock game.

In a surprisingly short period of time, he began making real progress. After a little training, he went on to fight Mr. Palhares in a controversial match where he successfully avoided the leg submissions of the Brazilian leg expert, only to get caught in an upper body submission. It didn't matter—he saw the value in what he had learned. Soon, he became a regular training partner with the squad.

Mr. Shields is a no-nonsense, hard-working sort of fellow who fit right in with the team. Very soon, he started telling me about his successes in training rooms around

the country, thanks to his new skills. Last night, Mr. Shields fought a professional grappling bout against MMA legend Lyoto Machida at an event run by MusclePharm.

Mr. Machida has always shown fine grappling skills in MMA and even has a win against grappling champion Rafael Lovato in submission grappling. Mr. Shields was able to showcase his great improvements in lower body submissions by locking in a very finely applied heel hook to force a submission. This demonstrated that new skills can indeed be built on an established game and that change is always possible if a commitment is made.

It was a great result for Mr. Shields and a testament to his dedication to learn and his confidence in using new weapons in a battle against such a skilled foe. Here, you can clearly see the great pressure he imparts upon Mr. Machida, forcing a submission on a very tough opponent.

Victory:

Gordon Ryan relaxes after a titanic no time limit match against the great Keenan Cornelius. After an epic one and a half hour struggle of tactics and endurance, Mr Ryan prevailed via heel hook variation. Both men showed tremendous skill and tactical sense, but Mr Ryan was coming off a tremendous camp and preparation and his morale was high. After several near misses, he saw opportunity on the legs and took it to victory. Mr Cornelius showed great character in taking this fight, as he is an

established superstar in the sport - to take a no time limit match against a youngster like Mr Ryan was a very commendable action on his part. Now the squad must resume training in preparation for EBI 8 and other future endeavors

Technique above all:

Nicky Ryan at age 15 wins the adult advanced division of Grappling Industries event showing a very finely developed leg lock game along with sound positional work. He closed out the first place with team mate Chris who also showed excellent submission skills via leg lock and sankaku. You can see in the photo how small he is in comparison with adults (it was an open weight division) and at 15, he is not even close to adult strength. It is remarkable to see such a young man do so well against strong and skilled adults. The ease and relaxed demeanor he shows when

competing against grown men of high skill level bodes very well for this very talented young man.

The real significance of this week in Judo:

Without question, this has been the most successful week in American Olympic judo history. However, few people understand the deeper significance of what happened this week. A truly great judoka, Isao Okano, was once speaking to a foreigner studying judo in Japan. He noted that the foreigner was making a concerted effort to be as Japanese as possible—not just learning judo, but learning to be Japanese.

Okano remonstrated with him, saying, "Don't try to be Japanese, try to be the best American living in Japan, studying judo, that you can be." He was making a very important point. When you try to copy another person's or culture's style, you lose your own identity, and usually, you never perform as well as the person you copied. A much better approach is to build a style that may have components taken from other influences but whose totality is uniquely your own.

This is exactly what Jimmy Pedro is doing so successfully with USA Judo. He is creating a unique American approach to the sport based on disciplined gripping, superior transitions from standing to the ground, and very strong newaza attacks on the floor to create a winning team and great success.

American judo has always seemed to suffer from a lack of identity. Attempts to copy Japanese and European models have brought only limited success. Mr. Pedro has found a style quite different from our competitors and has forged a winning team with it. Interestingly, this style goes in direct opposition to the current rules of modern judo, which greatly favor athletes who use mostly standing techniques. However, such is the strength of his approach that his athletes are winning regardless.

The future will tell if this model can survive the rule set of the modern sport, but the results so far are more promising than anything we have seen in American judo history. With the rise of grappling as a sport in North America and the cross-training that many athletes partake in, American newaza will only get stronger. Hopefully, this will create a new generation of athletes for this burgeoning American approach to the sport and the strong sense of identity it has created.

Golden Girl:

Another incredible day for American Judo as Kayla Harrison wins her second Olympic gold medal! She is the team mate of Travis Stevens, winner of the Olympic silver medal yesterday. Like Mr Stevens, her primary coach is the great Olympian Jimmy Pedro, who has done an incredible job preparing the American squad for the Rio Olympics.

I remember Mr Stevens telling me on many occasions how talented Ms Harrison is and how she was not only the best in the world on the mats, but also a truly good and admirable person off the mats - she has an incredible story behind her road to Olympic glory that is an inspiration to all who research it. She showed again how strong the American squad is in Ne Waza (ground grappling) and how the American team is using this skill set to advantage against the world's best. What an incredible year for American Judo, for Ms Harrison, Mr Stevens and Mr Pedro. America and the world grappling community is so lucky to witness their work and success

One great deed begets another:

I am always impressed by the way in which an outstanding deed by one student can serve as a catalyst to the other students and lift their performance. Inspired by the incredible performance of teammate Travis Stevens in taking a silver medal in the Olympics yesterday, the training room was alive with standout performances today.

There really is wisdom to the old idea that people feed off their surroundings- when we surround ourselves with outstanding people, each one lifts the next in a chain reaction that can produce something truly great - this may be an individual sport in competition, but in training it is a team that makes the difference. Finding the balance between our own individual ambitions and those of the people around us is the key to longevity in the sport and success within it.

Jiu jitsu - A Bronx Tale:

Around two years ago, a very close friend and student, Doug Pelinkovic, was terribly injured in a training accident. He had a school in the Bronx, NYC, and I was worried that his school would suffer as he would be out of commission for over a year.

I volunteered to teach every Monday night to help give the instructors direction and keep morale positive. Mr. Pelinkovic is a fine teacher himself, and the students were of a tremendous level, especially considering it was a small local school. I began teaching a similar program to the one I use with my students at RGA, and very soon, we saw great results. Submission skills increased tremendously, and on several occasions, when I brought in notable world champion black belts, they were put under tremendous pressure by the better students.

I tend to be a man of habit—once I start a routine, I intend to stick to it. Now, two years later, Mr. Pelinkovic is fully recovered, but I still go up every Monday to see how everyone is doing. You can see the results in this fine sequence shown by one of the leading students, Stanley Rosa, who demonstrates great form in a local tournament with some of the techniques we often work on.

Note how well Mr. Rosa switches between a relaxed body when movement is required and an isometric, tight body when immobilizing an opponent's limb is the goal. It's a superb demonstration of a skill that many students struggle with.

Olympic hero:

A massive congratulations to Travis Stevens, who represented our country with such brilliance and skill today in the pinnacle of all sports—the Olympic Games. Travis fought through some of the best judoka in the world to reach the finals, defeating his opponents with a superb blend of powerful and disciplined gripping, combined with a great sense of opportunity and technical precision on the mat. One could not hope to see a better display of the fusion of standing grappling (tachi waza) and ground grappling (ne waza).

The years of hard work under his great coach, Jimmy Pedro (himself a master of the interface between standing and ground), paid off with a memorable path to the finals. Mr. Stevens is the first American male to win a silver medal in Olympic judo since 1992. In doing so, he showed that the fusion of standing and ground grappling can produce incredible results at the very highest levels.

The squad is so proud of this amazing achievement—made all the more special by the fact that he fought not just for himself or his team, but for his nation. Thank you, Travis Stevens, for representing our nation and our sport so superbly. Can't wait to see you back in NYC!

Integrated grappling:

At the ADCC World Championships, Garry Tonon hits a nice variation of Ouchi Gari, one of his favorite takedowns, on the very talented Dillon Dannis, a fine student of Marcelo Garcia. This takedown set up what would prove to be the decisive finish to the match, a powerful inverted heel hook. It represents a good example of skills taken from judo and wrestling integrated into the submission wrestling game with very positive results.

What good are powerful submissions on the floor without the ability to bring the fight to the mat? Conversely, what good are throws and takedowns if you cannot do anything to a grounded opponent? Only when the two are merged do you get a truly effective fighter. I have never seen a jiu jitsu fighter get worse by adding judo and wrestling to his or her study, but I have seen many limit their development by failing to do so.

Any time, any place:

The only constant in the life of a professional athlete is training. Often, a busy competition schedule requires extensive travel commitments. That does not mean training can be sacrificed. The athlete must be prepared to work out effectively in unfamiliar surroundings, at whatever time is available, with whomever is available, and still get profitable work in. This requires planning and communication with the training partners you meet at each location so that they become a temporary part of your program, rather than a challenge to be faced—there will be enough challenge out under the lights at the big show.

Here, Garry Tonon gets good work in at Ralph Gracie's school in Northern California prior to a show. Ralph is the brother of my teacher, Renzo Gracie. The family connection always makes for a welcome training location when possible.

The Best-Laid Plans of Mice and Men: As a coach, one of the main aspects of my job is to conceive plans of action that raise the likelihood of an athlete winning an event. Yet, despite our best intentions, there is always a good chance of things

going awry that require spontaneous change and adaptation in the face of unexpected circumstances.

All the major MMA fight camps I have been a part of furnished unforeseen incidents and drama that could not have been predicted and which had to be overcome. Probably the most flawless and well-run fight camp I ever saw was that of Georges St-Pierre in preparation for Nick Diaz. (Interestingly, his prior fight camp with Carlos Condit was probably the worst.)

We had an excellent game plan, the physical preparation was excellent, superb choice of sparring partners, all match contingencies covered, no injuries, no backstage drama, perfect weight cut—everything was perfect—until the very night before the fight, when Georges drank some watermelon juice for rehydration that had been out of the fridge too long and got a badly upset stomach. He spent the entire night vomiting.

It was so sad to see such a perfect camp get ruined at the last minute by such a minor oversight. The night of the fight, Mr. St-Pierre came in underweight and drained. We had to curtail the warm-up for fear of exhausting him before the bout even began. There was also some drama with Mr. Diaz's camp insisting that both sides have their hand wraps double-checked. This was done, but we did not want them to see how bad Mr. St-Pierre looked, so he had to put on an act of confidence and vigor when they came into the dressing room.

In the end, Mr. St-Pierre showed why he was a great champion that night, putting on a dominant shut-out performance to win a unanimous decision. No one in the audience would have guessed how serious a problem he had to overcome. He used a system of pacing the rounds and timing the takedowns, allowing standing escapes to maintain the pace of the fight while controlling the action but, at the same time, not exhausting himself. It worked brilliantly, and the problem was overcome. This kind of adaptation is crucial in fight preparation at all levels.

Proactive and reactive approaches to the sport:

A very useful distinction to make in jiu-jitsu and combat sports in general is that between proactive and reactive approaches to the sport. A proactive game is one where I initiate moves against my opponent—I am the first to act. A reactive game is one where I wait for my opponent to act, and I react to his movement, taking advantage of any vulnerability that has arisen as a consequence of his initial action.

When one looks at important figures in the history of jiu-jitsu, most students usually identify quite quickly whether their game is predominantly proactive or reactive. For example, Helio Gracie is commonly seen as a classic example of a man whose game was largely reactive. He would play a rather passive game and look to exploit errors in his opponent's initial movements as the path to victory.

The great Marcelo Garcia is a fine example of a game that most people would identify as predominantly proactive. He would fight hard to initiate all the movements and, having gained an initial edge, work hard to maintain it through to the end.

Of course, every jiu-jitsu student has a responsibility to learn both aspects of the game. Of the two men I mentioned as exemplars of proactive and reactive styles, I am certain they could, if they wished, play the opposite game very well. They simply chose not to.

As a general trend over the decades, proactive approaches to the sport have become more popular than reactive ones, probably due to the imposition of time limits on matches. Now, I want to go much further with this distinction, as I believe it can illustrate some important lessons for combat sports in general, the greatest classical jiu-jitsu player of all time, and my own approach to the sport.

In my opinion, the optimal approach to jiu-jitsu and fighting as a whole is a mix of proactive and reactive games—but not in the sense that most people talk about. I don't mean that sometimes you play a proactive game and sometimes a reactive game. I mean **YOU PLAY BOTH AT THE SAME TIME.**

How is this possible, since they are diametric opposites? The answer is this: Your game can be split into disparate components. Some of those components can be proactive and some reactive. Thus, your game as a whole can have proactive and reactive components working in unison at the same time. Indeed, I believe that almost all great jiu-jitsu players exhibit both elements simultaneously (including the two mentioned above) and that the basic distinction between proactive and reactive games oversimplifies what I see in great players. It limits many students' understanding of the game and how to make progress.

The conventional narrative of a choice between a proactive or reactive approach to the sport is an oversimplification that limits our understanding of the best athletes in the game and, thus, our own attempts to improve. I will try to illustrate my point first with an example taken from boxing.

When most people watch Mike Tyson box, they see an aggressive, proactive fighter taking it to his opponents and overwhelming them. Yet, Mr. Tyson himself always described himself as a counterpuncher—a reactive puncher who capitalized on his opponent's initial strikes to counter and score. How is this possible?

Mr. Tyson took different parts of his game and employed a simultaneous, mixed proactive and reactive game. His initial footwork was straightforwardly proactive. He was always the first to initiate closing the gap and advancing into his opponent's space (usually behind a crouching jab allied with head movement for safety). This proactive advance forced a reaction from his opponent—because you cannot simply

ignore someone aggressively stepping into your space in boxing. His opponents would try to move and hit. It was at this point that the reactive elements of his game would emerge.

A boxer is never more vulnerable than when he has thrown a punch that does not land—he is now out of position and often off balance. Mr. Tyson's head movement and shifting footwork to angles made most of his opponents' punches miss, and this allowed him to punch reactively with the part of his game that most people remember—hooks and uppercuts with crushing power, delivered to people who were in no position to defend them. Thus, his game was an ingenious mix of proactive footwork and distance-closing, allied with reactive evasion and power punches.

If you try to categorize him as either a proactive or reactive fighter, you simply will not understand his game. It clearly exhibits elements of both, but in different areas of his overall strategy. The same is true of the athlete who I believe was the finest classical jiu-jitsu player I ever sparred with or saw—Roger Gracie.

Mr. Gracie's game is truly worthy of deep study. Once again, we see the idea of a simultaneous proactive and reactive game.

Mr. Gracie had a proactive positional game and a reactive submissions game. Very few people could impose a positional game in the manner in which Mr. Gracie did. When he got into top half guard, it felt as though someone had parked a Cadillac on your chest and asked you to play jiu-jitsu. His positional game is best alluded to via the image of a ratchet—it allowed movement in only one direction.

Once he gained a position on the classic hierarchy, it was rare indeed for him to lose it. If he ever gained any form of positional advantage, it was nearly impossible to take it back from him. This pressure could not be ignored by his struggling opponents. As they worked harder and harder to resist the positional pressure, their stance, posture, and movement became more vulnerable. This made the opportunity for reactive submissions more frequent and easier—usually in the form of what people consider basic submissions.

The deeper point is this: Mr. Gracie's game had both proactive and reactive elements working together at the same time—a proactive positional game allied with a reactive submissions game. The best players always seek to mix proactive and reactive elements simultaneously, rather than developing a game that is either all reactive or all proactive. This is possible because our overall game can be split into components, some of which can be proactive and some reactive, working in unison at the same time.

I often see students who are enthusiastic about learning a proactive attacking style based around submissions—this is a fine goal. However, they often lack the ability to create and maintain any form of positional pressure on their opponents. As a consequence, their opponents have an easier time defending against the submission attacks.

The best setup for all submissions is STRONG POSITIONAL PRESSURE THAT FUNCTIONS AS A CATALYST AND DISTRACTION TO THE ENSUING SUBMISSIONS.

Athletes who focus on submissions at the expense of positional pressure usually find that their success rate is low. This is because the lack of positional pressure allows their opponent to defensively position their limbs in a way that makes the submissions less likely to succeed. When the opponent is distracted by extreme positional pressure, they become so concerned with their position that they forget about the submission danger, and suddenly the submissions start coming much easier.

Now, this insight about our game being separated into different components, each with proactive and reactive elements working in unison, can be extended in many ways. For example, I can have a proactive armlock game allied with a reactive leg lock game, or a proactive sweeping game allied with a reactive leg lock game—the possibilities multiply wherever you look.

The foundation of the classical jiu-jitsu game, however, will always be the balance between positional pressure and submission, utilized by almost all top athletes and exemplified best by Roger Gracie, who did it better than anyone else in my experience. It is my belief that this classical ideal can itself be surpassed by a new approach to the position/submission dichotomy, but that will be discussed in future posts.

Working for advantage:

Most of the game of jiu jitsu is the business of gaining some form of preliminary advantage and once advantage is attained, launching a decisive attack with the intention of finishing the match. In the beginner levels, advantage is typically understood only in terms of relative position - getting past your opponents legs into upper body pins. As you go higher into the sport the notion of advantage must be greatly expanded.

Here I work with young standout Nicky Ryan, who at fifteen years of age has a very deep understanding of advantage in grappling. We are battling simultaneously for balance and foot position advantage and it looks like Mr Ryan is doing a better job than me! Time to abandon ship!

Everything begins with stance and posture:

When teaching, I always emphasize the iron law of stance and posture: the human body is capable of almost limitless configurations in stance and posture, and for any given task, there is a posture that optimizes the athlete's ability to perform that task. Our job is to find that posture under pressure and maintain it for as long as necessary, while seamlessly shifting from posture to posture, stance to stance, as our tasks change second by second during a bout.

Here, Georges St-Pierre demonstrates near-perfect posture in the open position as he squares off with the very dangerous Josh Koscheck, who displays a slightly different posture that is more appropriate for the skills he possesses. Both men have their respective tasks, and both have chosen the ideal initial posture relative to those tasks. So often, I see athletes who have a clear idea of what they want to do, but find themselves working much harder than necessary due to poor stance and posture.

When one begins to learn a move in jiu-jitsu, the first step is to learn the correct mechanics. Ultimately, however, you must go far beyond this and learn to apply moves against skilled resistance. Only then can you hope to win at the highest levels. You must be able to anticipate and overcome even the most determined counters to the moves you employ. Here, Olivier Taza follows an opponent through a vigorously applied defense to a heel hook variation—breaking through the resistance and earning the submission at a recent show in England.

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Calm under pressure:

One of the most crucial attributes of good competitors is the ability to maintain calm under pressure. The ability to solve problems as they arise during the match is absolutely crucial to victory. Your ability to solve problems is directly related to your ability to maintain as calm a mind as possible as you work. If you look at the faces of elite athletes in all sports as they engage in tough competition, it is surprising how calm and composed they look despite the immense pressure they are under.

Here Ethan Crelinsten works hard against teammate Frank Rosenthal - both men showed excellent use of leg locks and back attacks at the recent Finishers Sub Only tournament and fought a pitched battle in the final. You can practically see their minds working to solve problems as they battle for control. This kind of internal control over our own mind and demeanor is a prerequisite of control over an

opponent's body. It must be developed in the gym like any other skill - you will need it in competition outside the gym

Thought Experiment:

Imagine we came across a race of human-like creatures who were identical to us in every way, except for one strange feature: located in the middle of their foreheads was an "off switch." When pressed, this button would literally turn them off and temporarily paralyze them. As you begin to talk to them and live among them, you learn that they are avid martial artists with a highly developed grappling style, which is very popular among their people.

Now, ask yourself: what do you think their martial art would look like? What would its main moves and concepts be? I believe it's clear that their martial art would revolve around elaborate sets of skills designed to reach and activate their opponent's off button while preventing their own from being reached. Every match would simply be a race to find and press that off button, while vigorously defending your own.

Now, ask yourself another question: how different are we from these imaginary people? A moment of reflection reveals that we are not so different as most people might think. We humans have our own "off buttons." The most obvious one to a jiu-jitsu player is the neck.

Much of jiu-jitsu is indeed quite similar to the martial art of these imaginary creatures. It's a race to get to your opponent's neck while protecting your own. Of course, we also use joint locks as a means of finishing, but in truth, joint locks are not a true "off switch." When we submit to a joint lock, it is a choice we make in order to avoid injury. Even in extreme cases where a joint is broken, continuing to fight is still a choice (though most wisely choose to stop). However, in a stranglehold, once the submission is fully applied, the choice of whether to continue fighting is not ours—it's taken away by unconsciousness. This makes the stranglehold a true "off button," far beyond what joint locks can offer.

Therefore, it is imperative that students develop strong strangulation skills from the earliest stages in their training. In addition, they must work hard on the positional skills that allow them to get into and maintain strangling positions. They must be able to escape a pin and return to guard when on the bottom, and when on top, they must be able to pass their opponent's legs and control the upper body, both from the front and back.

I firmly believe that these foundational positional skills are of paramount importance, even in the context of submission grappling events where they are not rewarded with points. I will elaborate on this in future posts, as my greatest fear for the submission grappling movement is that it will degenerate into sloppy, poorly executed submission attempts. In such a scenario, competitors would have no real

control over each other's movements, instead relying on sheer volume of attempts, hoping that one will eventually succeed.

This would be a disaster for the sport. One of the best ways to counter this degeneration is through solid training in strangulation skills. Strangles rarely happen without good positional control. Here, the great Roger Gracie—arguably the greatest grappling strangler of all time—demonstrates the juji-jime, or cross-collar strangle, one of his most effective moves. Mr. Gracie epitomizes the integration of sound positional skills with strangulation, creating a truly formidable attacking platform that few of his peers could match.

New Champion:

Huge congratulations to new welterweight champion, Tyron Woodley. He dethroned the great Robbie Lawler in the weight division that has the most sentimental appeal to myself and so many fans. It has been a year of dramatic change in MMA. Robbie Lawler has been a very impressive champion indeed, but Mr Woodley showed patience and plan to wait for his title shot and when the chance came, he did what champions do - take a small opportunity and make the most of it - a spectacular KO on a man who seemed impervious to blows in championship fights.

This was always going to be a clash between fight ending explosiveness in the early rounds versus incredible sustenance over five rounds. As so often happens, the quick starter inflicted damage from which no recovery was possible and he took a well deserved and spectacular victory.

Rainy Sunday afternoon:

Grey day in Manhattan - perfect for a day of technical training with the squad. Georges St-Pierre and the team go over details and concepts at a pace that allows for skill progression and helps to avoid athlete burn out, a common problem for people competing many times a year. Ethan Crelinsten shows great work ethic by coming in for training the day after winning the 135 pound division of Finishers Sub Only event, where he used a combination of leg locks and back control to take first place. Tomorrow the weekly cycle of training begins anew with different intensity level and emphasis.

Size difference:

The essential quality of jiu jitsu is to be able to control greater size and aggression with less. In the gym we are expected to spar with whoever you match up with in class, which often entails people larger than yourself. Some, like Garry Tonon, make it a feature of their competitive career also. His standout performances against big men like Marcus Almeida Buchecha, Roberto Cyborg Abreu, Vinny Magalhaes, Rousimar Palhares and here, Ralek Gracie, provide inspiration and live up to the ideals of jiu jitsu. Matches of this kind force us to emphasize different aspects of body and limb positioning, along with tactical considerations, in order to cope with the weight disadvantage.

While it would be simply dishonest to claim that size and strength are not very important in determining the outcome of bouts (there is a reason why there are weight/age/sex divisions in combat sports), it is nonetheless remarkable how training

and tactics can allow a smaller person to perform very well against much larger people in what often become thrilling underdog matches.

Ups and downs:

This photo was taken prior to Chris Weidman's first fight with Anderson Silva. After battling past all the other contenders for a title shot, Mr. Weidman suffered a catastrophic injury to his shoulder in a training accident. I still remember getting the gut-wrenching news from him via phone - it seemed his dream of a UFC title fight against the greatest middleweight of all time was gone. Soon after, Mr. Weidman went through major reconstructive surgery.

Shortly after the surgery, my good friend Doug Pelinkovic and I went to see him, bringing what money we had, food, and our company to help. Soon after this, he would experience terrible loss again, losing his house to Hurricane Sandy. To anyone in that room that night, it would seem impossible that this man would soon come back in the best shape of his life with near-perfect preparation and decisively defeat Mr. Silva to attain his dream. Looking at this photo now, I remember the doubts and fears we all felt that night and marvel at the outcome brought about by dedication to a program, a dream, and unshakeable self-belief.

There will always be ups and downs in our lives. In those dark times, it is crucial to keep your dreams alive by setting realistic goals in a program towards first recovery, then regaining your former level, and finally moving forward to new levels. An odd twist to this photo is that Mr. Pelinkovic would shortly afterwards suffer a terrible accident that required multiple reconstructive surgeries. I was

already suffering from severe hip problems that ultimately required hip replacement surgery – so everyone in the photo went through problems requiring major surgery.

As each man went through problems, he found inspiration and assistance in the actions and achievements of the other two in ways that helped him return to his place in the sport. This kind of mutual support is a crucial addition to the goal setting mentioned earlier. One of the few certainties that life offers us is fluctuation in fortune. Creating the needed conditions to turn good times out of the darkness of bad times is critical to your longevity in the sport and indeed, life in general.

Professional cornering:

Here is an interesting photo. It was taken less than a second before the submission victory of Garry Tonon over Ralek Gracie at Metamoris 7. Mr. Tonon has secured ushiro ashi garami and is faking a figure-four toe hold to create a reaction in order to enter a kneebar variation. The trap has been set, and all that remains is for him to shift his left arm to Mr. Gracie's leg – in half a second, he will do so, and victory will be his. Garry knows this, I know it, and so does Gordon Ryan. We have all seen and done the move a thousand times – the only ones who don't know what is about to happen are Mr. Gracie himself and the audience members you see behind us. Yet, if you look at myself and Mr. Ryan, you will see no emotion on our faces, even though we know victory is at hand.

There is no sense of jubilation, even though we know victory is certain. So often I see cornermen, even in high-level events, who essentially function as cheerleaders rather than cornermen. The central idea of a corner man is to offer advice that leads to performance improvement. Yet, I usually see behavior that does nothing to improve performance. All too often, the advice is so general as to be useless. "Get out of there!" does not help an athlete escape a pin. Advice must be specific and purposeful, rather than general or emotional.

I believe there are a few exceptions where certain kinds of emotional cornering can have value, but in the majority of cases, dispassionate, technically useful, and tactically sound advice is needed, rather than cheerleading and fervent emotional appeals. MMA cornering is further complicated by the notion of physical recovery between rounds, but in grappling events, this is not the case. Every time one acts as a cornerman, one must ask, "Is this action aiding my athlete's performance?" When those actions stem primarily from emotion and ineffectual generalities, the answer is usually no.

Current and past goals:

As a coach, I often try to set goals for myself and my students. These goals vary greatly in scope and size. For example, I might have a small goal over the next seven days, or a bigger project over the next three months. At any given time, there may be dozens of different goals for different people, stretching over various lengths of time. While all of these daily, weekly, and monthly goals are being set and (hopefully) attained, there must also be larger goals—goals that define your career as a coach or athlete.

In my life, I set three initial large-scale goals as a coach. The first was to be part of the development of a truly significant figure in the sport of MMA. I wanted to help in the transition of MMA from its early days, where single-discipline fighters engaged in battles against other styles, to the modern era of well-rounded athletes who saw MMA as an autonomous sport, separate from the various core disciplines that most people believed made it up. I believe I achieved this goal through the tremendous career accomplishments of Georges St-Pierre.

My second goal was to help in the development of a fighter who would defeat the only person I believed had a legitimate claim to contend with Mr. St-Pierre as the greatest UFC fighter of all time, Anderson Silva. Mr. Silva was considerably bigger than Mr. St-Pierre, and the negotiations for a superfight were never satisfactory for both sides and the organization—so training a genuine 185-pounder for the fight made more sense. I believe I achieved this goal through the tremendous career work of Chris Weidman.

My third goal pertained to the sport of grappling/jiu jitsu rather than MMA. I wanted to change the traditional perspective in our sport of leg locks as a low-percentage, desperation move that ran outside of the standard "position before submission" model, and show that leg locks could be made part of a grappling system that was every bit as effective, reliable, and control-based as the more commonly seen upper-body submissions usually favored by our sport. I believe I achieved this through the burgeoning careers of Eddie Cummings, Garry Tonon, and Gordon Ryan.

I am now working on my fourth goal: to greatly enhance and improve the notion of system-based thinking in the sport of jiu jitsu in ways that significantly improve athletes' ability to work submissions ranging over the entire body into their game; and, through this, change people's attitudes about innovation and progress in our sport. The notion of systemic thinking underlies the entire fabric of jiu jitsu. Indeed, I believe that the fact that traditional BJJ had a simple, coherent, and very effective system of strategy and techniques was the single most important reason for its success in early MMA.

It explains why it dominated less systematic approaches to fighting in those early days. Over the next few months, I will have to explain exactly what a system is (in the context of martial arts), some of the limitations of the traditional BJJ system, and how these can be improved upon to create a more advanced approach to the sport that can help it towards its ideal—control that leads to submission.

A discussion along these lines will open up many fascinating topics, far too many for one Facebook post, but will feature in many future posts that will hopefully shed some light on my project. I also hope to discuss some of these notions with a man who has done a great deal to promote jiu jitsu to a very wide audience in the related world of MMA in a podcast format—Joe Rogan (when scheduling permits).

Some aspects of this exciting new approach have started to emerge in the work of my students, and I hope we will begin to illustrate still more in the future. Of course, in any highly competitive endeavor, there will be ups and downs, successes and failures, but the emerging patterns are very positive, and I believe fervently that they can be of great benefit to the jiu jitsu community as a whole.

Our squad has a 100% success rate in the top echelon submission-only event—the Eddie Bravo Invitational—we have never entered without winning—with a submission defense and offense rate that dwarfs rival teams. Is it a fortuitous accident or indicative of an underlying systems-based approach that can help improve the sport?

The decision he made was a strange one, as he knew very well that he had no chance

of winning EBI before he even entered, as he was easily crushed by the top students in training and had virtually no chance in a clash with Mr. Cummings. Among the top members of our squad, the result of any given sparring session can go either way—they can all submit each other, and every match is fiercely competitive. It is a hard thing to tell students that their potential space in a high-profile show with major prize money has been taken by someone they know they can easily defeat. Nonetheless, Mr. Davila made the decision to stay in the event.

Now let us get something clear—I like ambition in my students. I like teaching people who want to be the best in the world—as I believe Mr. Davila does—but NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF TEAMMATES WHO HAVE WORKED MUCH LONGER, HARDER, AND AT A MUCH HIGHER LEVEL AND WHO CLEARLY AND UNEQUIVOCALLY DESERVE IT MORE THAN YOU BASED ON A SIMPLE ANALYSIS OF GYM AND COMPETITION PERFORMANCE. I believe self-interest is a very important quality, not just for athletes but for all individuals in every aspect of life. Self-interest propels us forward and motivates the majority of our actions.

Self-interest is the bedrock of most great human achievements—but it must be tempered by an ethos of cooperation and fairness if it is not to degenerate into a

free-for-all where conflict, favoritism, cronyism, and other destructive and unfair elements start to creep in. In a competitive world of self-interested people, the fairest system that I know of is a meritocracy, and that is what we use.

If the story ended at this point, I STILL would have shaken Mr. Davila's hand after the bout, even though I strongly disapproved of his actions and the way he entered the tournament. However, more followed. Mr. Pelinkovic was horrified at the decision. Unlike me, he comes from a traditional karate background where loyalty to a school and teacher is everything. He told Mr. Davila that if he made such a decision, he would be asked to leave his academy. Bear in mind that Mr. Pelinkovic had been very generous indeed to Mr. Davila.

For example, his monthly pay as a purple and brown belt in his local academy was exceptionally high—higher than any I have ever heard of. All of his competition expenses, including airfare and accommodation, were paid by Mr. Pelinkovic. Mr. Pelinkovic had taken him from white belt to brown belt, introduced him to the best training partners, and given him a very secure job in a field that he loved. Indeed, Mr. Pelinkovic was in the process of scouting a new location for a second RGA affiliate with the intention of having Mr. Davila not only run it but be a partner as well. For all his social media posts on this subject, not one has alluded to any of these facts regarding Mr. Pelinkovic's generosity. He had invested a very considerable amount of knowledge, time, effort, and money in Mr. Davila.

Mr. Davila's first action was to immediately join Marcelo Garcia's school. Surely he could have waited the three weeks until after the show so that he could at least acknowledge at the event that Mr. Pelinkovic was his real mentor and coach and where he came from and the gym that forged his skill set. It would have been a great boost to the small local school in the Bronx that had given him so much. I understand that at some point he would need to join another gym to get his black belt and continue progress, but surely that could have waited a few weeks. Then he started teaching merely blocks away from Mr. Pelinkovic's school as a direct competitor to his former benefactor, with friends and students he had pulled from there.

Now, me personally—I don't really give a damn where you decide to train—that's your business. I believe we live in a free market where the buyer should make the choice. If I am doing my job properly, students should WANT to stay with me rather than be forced by peer pressure or tradition. I am not a fan of the traditional "one sensei for your whole life" idea. I have had students leave RGA and go to Marcelo's, and I have had Marcelo's students leave there to come here. I am still friendly with all of them and laugh and joke when we run into each other—they can all testify to that.

Whatever small rivalry we have with Marcelo's team is all in good fun. I have met many of his top students, and they were all great fellows, like their teacher. I will not train someone who is currently directly competing against my students or teaching them to compete against my students, as that would be a disservice to my own people who give me so much and to whom I am very loyal. Other than that, I teach pretty much anyone I like, including people that fought in the past against my

students. However, to a traditionalist like Mr. Pelinkovic, this was horrifying and a real stab to the heart.

Mr. Davila knows Mr. Pelinkovic's mindset very well and knew that this would be the case—and did it anyway—to a man and mentor who had been EXCEPTIONALLY generous to him. This was not the impulsive and ill-considered action of a young man. Mr. Davila is 34 years old. This was the considered and thought-out decision of a mature man in his mid-thirties. In the end, he valued his participation in a single tournament, for which he was less qualified than his peers and whom he had unfairly pushed past and entered by doubtful means, over his relationship with Mr. Pelinkovic, his very generous coach and benefactor.

The creed which Mr. Pelinkovic's students recite every night says, "be faithful." It is central to his view of the arts, and to throw that in his face after he had done so much for him was, in my mind, very poor behavior indeed. Adding insult to injury, in several social media posts both before and after the event, he thanked his new school and training partners—with whom he had trained only two weeks—for assistance in preparing for the event. Apparently, the six-plus years of training with Mr. Pelinkovic did not warrant any form of recognition— even though anyone with a set of eyes can see that the techniques used to gain victory in his matches in EBI are obviously those emphasized and taught by myself and which he learned from my student, Mr. Pelinkovic.

When the event started, I made a personal decision not to shake his hand as a small sign that I disapproved of the way he handled the situation with his mentor. To those who think I am some kind of cultist who tells everyone around him what to do—I did not tell Eddie Cummings to do the same, though I know he was upset about Mr. Davila's entry into the tournament. I don't legislate morality to others—but I will not shake a man's hand—a symbol of respect—if I do not respect what he has knowingly done to a dear friend.

I have many faults of character, but I am not fake. If I shake your hand, it means we are friends, or being introduced as friends, or we are resolving a problem between us. I won't shake your hand if my heart is not in it—there is no politician's handshake with me. Just because a camera is pointed at me does not mean I will put on a fake smile and handshake.

The bout itself went exactly as anyone in our training room would have predicted—a one-sided dismantling of a good grappler by an extremely good one. To those of us from the training room, it seemed pointless and a waste of time—there were others in our training room who could have put on a much better show. Hopefully, they will get their chance in the future.

I like to take positive lessons from unhappy circumstances. In this case, the good news is that Mr. Cummings got a good opportunity to show some of the more basic elements of our back attack system and demonstrate that he is much more than just a leg locker. He did a very fine job of this.

The other positive is that a mid-level student, an early brown belt versed in the systems we teach, can enter a premier show, get all the way to the semi-finals, and defeat some elite competitors. Mr. Davila showed a fine leg lock attack in regulation

time in his first match and a very well-applied arm lock in overtime in his second match to defeat grappling stalwart Baret Yoshida—a tribute to the teaching skills of his mentor, Mr. Pelinkovic, and his own hard work in learning and applying those lessons. This sends a positive message to our developing students that they are not far from the big leagues, and even our mid-tier athletes can do well at a major competition with the systems we teach.

I am certain Mr. Davila will continue to improve in the future. He is very talented and hardworking, and he is going from one great team to another. But in my opinion, some of his actions leading up to the event were straightforwardly wrong, and I expressed that in the way I did. I also believe that a discussion of them can have a positive effect by shedding some light on what I believe is the healthiest type of team culture in a very competitive industry—rooted in self-interest and the delicate balance between competition and cooperation in the gym.

While self-interest and ambition are crucial for great and significant performances, they must be tempered by a sense of fairness based on merit and of giving back to those who have given to you. Without this, naked self-interest and ambition will inevitably lead to conflict and a breakdown in team cohesion—resulting in deteriorating training conditions and lowering performance. At some point, a line has to be drawn, and behavior that can damage a team has to be criticized, lest it become the norm and problems develop.

If Mr. Davila should make an effort to make up for what he did to his mentor, I will be the first to shake his hand. Until then, I stand by my actions and believe it was the appropriate thing to do.

Kuzushi in jiu jitsu:

One of the great insights of the grandfather of our art, Jigoro Kano, was the importance of **kuzushi**—the act of off-balancing an opponent—as a precursor to throwing them.

In the standing position, the act of knocking someone off balance is crucial to being able to throw them with minimal effort and with little probability of being countered. When someone is off balance, they must, for a critical fraction of a second, devote all their attention to recovering their stability—that is the time for you to throw.

Kano made this insight the centerpiece of his art. In the standing position, good judo players are masters of creating kuzushi. When facing them, it can feel like the soles of your shoes are covered in Vaseline as you stand on ice in an earthquake.

One of the most important tenets of my approach to ground grappling, or **ne waza**, is that I want to take the notion of kuzushi and apply it to ground work just as Kano did to standing work. The act of off-balancing an opponent prior to attack is just as useful on the floor as it is on the feet—especially when working from bottom

position. All of your bottom submission attacks and sweeps become dramatically more effective when your opponent is constantly being taken out of balance.

My whole approach to bottom position is built upon the pattern of employing kuzushi generators—movements designed to take an opponent off balance—whenever possible to make bottom **ne waza** more effective.

Most people work bottom position with their primary emphasis on grip and immobilization of their opponent by wrapping them up as tightly as possible. Beginners typically hold their closed guard as tightly as possible, thinking that this is the way to success. I believe a much better approach is to focus on kuzushi as the basis of all bottom position and to feed all attacks off an initial attack on the opponent's base of support.

Thus, my approach to guard work and all pin escapes is built around the ability to generate kuzushi upon my opponent. In my experience, this approach always trumps other bottom methodologies based around holding opponents tightly in place with legs and arms.

Here, Eddie Cummings uses our kuzushi-based approach to guard work in a fierce contest against world champion Augusto "Tanquinho" Mendes. Observe how Mr. Cummings, despite being slightly smaller, has Mr. Mendes completely elevated with only a single limb on the floor for balance.

This is where world championship fighting gets decided, yet this critical skill is rarely taught in a systematic fashion. As a result, it remains a skill used by most world champions and ignored by the vast majority of casual practitioners.

Always time for work:

Just prior to the start of EBI 7 I run Garry Tonon through his grappling drills and skills on the very mat that the competition was held on later that night as work crews assemble and prepare the stage. Gordon Ryan is assisting me. Of course he was not competing that night - it was his final preparation for Metamoris the next evening.

We got in a great workout prior to the big show that set him up well to put on a winning performance the following day - then we went straight downstairs to help get Eddie Cummings ready for a winning performance that evening. This ability to get

quality work in a short time in any location is key for a professional athlete working in the compressed schedule of the final days before competition.

Lock out! Garry Tonon shows near perfect form in a variation of a knee bar attack last night in LA against Ralek Gracie. Such was the technical precision of the move that it got an instant tap against a very skilled opponent around 40pounds heavier than himself. It was nice to see Mr Tonon broadening his competition leg lock repertoire in such fine fashion. Touched down back in old NYC - heading straight to Renzo Gracie Academy from the airport to teach - perhaps kneebars from ushiro ashi garami might be the subject matter today

A fun day teaching a seminar on back attack system at my good friend Shawn William's academy in LA shortly before Garry Tonon's bout with Ralek Gracie. Always a pleasure to catch up with old friends and gauge the progress of his students whilst keeping them up to date with developments in our game

Big weekend for the squad:

Garry Tonon wins a hard fought match against a very tough Ralek Gracie via leg lock submission. It was a fascinating camp and match as we knew very little about the opponent other than the fact that he was around 40 pounds heavier than Mr Tonon and came from a very fine grappling pedigree. Mr Gracie showed excellent defensive poise and training, a credit to his family heritage, but in the end, Mr Tonon was able to break through successfully with a fine variation of a kneebar out of ushiro ashi garami.

Here we all relax with the two stars of the weekend - Eddie Cummings and Garry Tonon, who won every match they entered this weekend via submission and advanced our method of grappling in a way that was very pleasing

indeed. Now I have to go straight to airport and fly home to NYC and get ready to teach tomorrow morning!

Big night for the squad in LA at EBI 7:

Eddie Cummings wins again - every match by submission in regulation time to win the maximum possible prize money of \$20,000. Mr Cummings was able to extend his submission range in this event and incorporate elements of our back attack system which proved so effective for Gordon Ryan in the previous EBI. This system will, I have no doubt, prove as game changing as our leg lock system. It gave his performance a well rounded look featuring both Leg locks and strangles and exploded the myth that his game is one dimensional.

His game simply looked several levels above his competitors and shows how he is continuing to make technical progress at a rapid rate. Interestingly the other competitors seem to be following our lead in submission grappling style, but lacked the nuances to make it work. Now we will go on to tomorrow where Garry Tonon will square off with Ralek Gracie in what will be a fascinating contrast in styles along with a big size advantage to Mr Gracie. Thank you as always for your interest in the exploits of the squad and our attempts to change the sport of submission grappling.

The subtleties of ashi garami:

Whenever you attempt ashi garami, there will inevitably be some degree of exposure of your feet and legs to your opponents counters. This unavoidable fact must be factored into your plans as you launch your attacks. Sound knowledge of the many subtleties of foot and leg positioning is essential if you are to

avoid being strongly countered as you attempt your own locks. A fascinating example of this occurred in what was probably the greatest leg lock battle of all time between leg locking maestros Garry Tonon and Rousimar Palhares.

Mr Tonon shocked many by initiating all the leg locks in the match on the much larger and universally feared Mr Palhares. In characteristic style, Mr Palhares aggressively countered with his own locks. The crowd gasped as both men went hard for the break. Most people in the audience expected Mr Palhares to prevail due to his size and reputation as a leg breaker. Yet it was he who had to break away first.

Mr Tonon did a fine job of positioning his feet in a manner that gave him mechanical advantage in this ferocious leg lock shoot out. Every jiu jitsu student must have faith in the idea that Mechanical advantage will prevail over size and aggression - this is the proposition upon which our entire sport is based - Mr Tonon showed his faith that night. Interestingly, as the match progressed, Mr Palhares stopped trying to counter leg lock and went straight to escape as a safety measure - such was the precision and effectiveness of Mr Tonon's leg attacks on his opponent. Here the two men go for their respective locks early in the match.

Progressive training programs:

It is of the first importance that you design training programs that continually refine existing skills whilst adding new ones. So often I see people who make a certain amount of progress and then stop, often resulting in drop out or stagnation. When I first started training young Georges St-Pierre, he was just a blue belt. He would come down part time and learn what he could. When he first fought Matt Hughes, he was very inexperienced and his overall game, though filled with enthusiasm and talent, was unrefined.

It was just his third fight in the octagon against the man who that time, was the most dominant welterweight in the sports history. Amazingly, Mr St-Pierre came out on fire and took Me Hughes down and appeared to be winning the first round - only to be caught in a beginner level mistake and lose by armbar submission. The next time the two fought, a greatly matured Georges St-Pierre knocked Mr Hughes out to win the title. When they met a third time, Mr St-Pierre was a very good black belt in Jiu jitsu.

I encouraged him to show this taking the fight to the floor and looking for submissions, even though the floor was Mr Hughes forte and it would have been safer to look for a standing KO as he had done in the second match. When the fight went to the floor it was immediately apparent just how much progress had been made. Mr St-Pierre easily passed guard into dominant pins and finished his legendary opponent with the very same armbar that he once lost to. Underneath the irony was an important lesson in progress.

Time and training, ordered according to a rational plan, can completely reverse the relative skills levels of two athletes. It is so important that training programs be monitored to ensure progress is being made and that degeneration has not set in. Only in this way can you reasonably expect to defeat tomorrow the people who are beating you today.

Last training day in NYC:

Last training day for the squad. As always, the idea is to take the athlete to a peak on the night of the big show. That means a juggling of conflicting demands and priorities that makes for an interesting last week. In this case it was particularly interesting as the two athletes involved have very different opponents in a completely different rule set and are themselves very different individuals.

Here Eddie

Cummings and I fervently discuss possible scenarios and problems whilst the supremely confident Garry Tonon looks on in bemusement at our folly. When two truly horrible people like myself and Garry Tonon are looking happy and smiling menacingly whilst looking at the same thing out on the mats, that can mean only one thing...some poor hapless student has royally screwed up a move that was just taught - probably locked a kimura with hands improperly placed, or messed up ashi garami leg positioning or even worse, Eddie Cummings attempting any move in the standing position.

We are happy because we are about to launch into a fusillade of verbal abuse and torment that will involve several different languages, evoking many gods and as many different generations of slang and curse words as we can yell in the time allotted. #horriblesenseisatwork

Composure:

When one looks at the best jiu jitsu players in competition, it is clear that the majority of them exhibit a very impressive degree of composure as they compete - even when they are under tremendous physical pressure. This stands in contrast to an average beginner class where most of the students grunt and grimace their way through the session, even when under very little pressure.

This transition from grunting beginner to composed expert is critical to your long term success. Only when you are in a relatively composed and mentally relaxed state can you work methodically through the many small details required to make the moves work and make second by second adaptations to your opponents resistance.

Remember this: it is not enough to merely defeat your opponent in training.

You must be able to understand HOW and WHY you defeated him, so that you can replicate and eventually improve upon that performance next time. If every muscle fiber in your body is in maximal tension and your lungs are on fire, you will assuredly not be able to recall what you did during the match to win and thus you will not remember the details that brought you victory and employ them upon subsequent opponents - thus ensuring poor rates of progress in training.

Learn to keep your physical intensity levels at a level where you can think and remember the reasons for success and failure in each sparring session so that each lesson builds upon the other in a way that generates progress over time, rather than a collections of exhausting brawls that furnish no lessons for the future and guarantee performance plateaus. Here Olivier Taza shows admirable composure as he locks in a heel hook to finish another opponent.

Note that he is literally observing his own actions as he performs them to ensure the various details are in order. There is no unnecessary tension, just enough to get the job done. He is in full control of his mental faculties as he performs the move. Whether the move succeeds or fails he will be able to tell you why and how. Thus will he be able to either replicate its success or correct its failure the next time he uses it.

Passing guard:

If you have ever had the experience of watching an MMA fight with a

group of people who know very little about fighting, it will immediately become apparent that none of them understand the significance of the fighter on top working to get past his opponent's legs to a secure and dominant pin position - passing the guard. To the naive, every top position is equally dominant.

The Japanese appear to have been the first in the modern era to note that this is not the case. Kano's judo clearly specifies that pins (osaekomi) do not count unless the fighter in top clears his opponents legs. The Brazilians inherited this tradition and greatly added to it, making it the centerpiece of their top game. The habit of pressuring past your opponents legs to side or mounted positions must be ingrained from the earliest days of training.

Only by being able to pass your opponents legs will you be able to attack your opponents entire body with submissions. If I cannot get past my opponents legs, the only submissions I can attempt are locks to the legs. Whilst these are very good and effective, they are only 50% of my opponent's body. Eventually my opponent will see my attacks as predictable and counter. The ability to pass the legs means I can also attack arms and strangleholds - bringing the entire body into the firing line and making my attacks more wide ranging and thus far less predictable.

In addition to making the whole body a target for my offense, guard passing strongly undermines my opponents offense. The vast majority of grappling offense from bottom position involves the use of the legs tangling around my head, arms and legs. Once I clear the legs, my opponent cannot do anything offensive until he first recovers his leg position. Considerations like these show why it is so important for developing students to form the habit of constantly pushing past their opponents legs into dominant pins.

Among a crowd of MMA fans, when you see one of

them murmuring approvingly as the top fighter passes his opponents guard whilst all around the naive fans boo and hiss, you know you have found a kindred spirit. Here, Eddie Cummings and I tussle for leg position

Three milestone UFC's:

whatever complaints people may voice about the UFC, it remains the longest running, most prestigious, most financially successful, most recognizable MMA organization among a sea of failed competitors. UFC 1 was the shot heard around the martial arts world that started a revolution. It transformed overnight the public's ideas of what real fighting would be like. UFC 100 was the biggest event in UFC history, with superstars like Brock Lesnar and Georges St-Pierre and the then unknown, Jon Jones.

Mr St-Pierre fought the outstanding kick boxer Tiago Alves that night. It was truly a coaching highlight for me. I was privileged to be among the top MMA talent in the world - a who's who of fighting all stars from every era of the sport and to see Mr St-Pierre put on a flawless display to win a decisive victory from cage side. By UFC 100 the sport has matured greatly from its primitive beginnings and Mr St-Pierre epitomized the modern professional fighter in a sport exploding in popularity. Now we are in the eve of another milestone for the sport and the organization. UFC 200 represents new improvements in drug testing.

Earlier UFC's had only the most rudimentary testing. Mr St-Pierre's stand against drug use and retirement over the issue prompted much discussion and change. Now the testing system, whilst far from perfect, is considerably better than previous milestone UFC's. This is a healthy direction for the sport. Here's to UFC 200 - I hope one day I watch a UFC 1000 and marvel at the

positive changes since those crazy early days .

Positional advantage:

A core element of Jiu jitsu is the notion of advantage. As much as possible, students are encouraged to seek some form of advantage prior to attack. In

this sense, jiu jitsu is the skill of creating unfair playing conditions in my favor. Most students are introduced to the notion of advantage through the concept of POSITIONAL advantage.

Indeed, this is the basic structure by which the sport is judged and scored.

This provides an excellent and easily understood means of getting students thinking along the correct lines as well as giving them a very effective sense of direction as they

spar each other. Interestingly, the concept of positional advantage is only really taught

and discussed on the ground. In fact it applies just as much in standing positions, though this is not reflected in the scoring system. Here I coach one of the best means of

gaining positional advantage on the feet - a variation of the duck under, which takes us

from a neutral position in front of our opponent to an advantageous one behind him.

Peaking for an event:

The main purpose of our training overall is to raise our general skill level in the sport of jiu jitsu to the highest degree possible. The purpose of a fight

camp is quite different. Here the emphasis is on maximizing our performance against a

specific opponent or set of opponents on a particular date in a particular venue. As such, the training tends to be much more specialized and structured according to the

time available before the event.

As Eddie Cummings prepares for EBI 7 we begin to

work on specific drills for given opponents. Here we work on leg pommeling drills in the

ashi garami position where the subtleties of the leg lock game come into play. So many people see only the general features of this position and claim knowledge that they simply do not have. I often tell the squad "it is one thing for everyone to SEE what you do, it is quite another for them to FEEL IT." People look with superficial eyes and miss entirely the key elements that make our game effective. Daily drilling between Mr Cummings, myself and the rest of the squad keeps his skill set moving in the right directions as EBI 7 approaches...

Young masters:

One of the enduring cliches of the martial arts is the idea of the aged master, having spent a lifetime acquiring knowledge, having greater fighting ability than his younger, less knowledgeable opponent. The simple observation that the old masters of the sport never appear on the medal podiums puts this silly cliché to rest. There is a lot more to fighting ability than knowledge.

More importantly, I want to go further and say that age and time in the sport is not even a guarantee of greater knowledge. It is my belief that students can be taught in such a way that they can become young masters - they can have the knowledge of people who have spent a lifetime in the sport whilst still in their athletic prime. The key is in their method of instruction. So often I see the following problems that limit knowledge acquisition over time.

First, students stop learning at a certain point and permanently plateau. Second, their instruction leaves them with only partial understandings of technique rather than complete understanding. Third, less than optimal methods of inculcating whatever theoretical knowledge they have into their physical movement in ways that lead to lowered performance. It is my belief that if these limitations are removed, there is absolutely no reason why a dedicated student of a young age could not acquire a degree of knowledge that would

shock his older masters. This is always the way in which I teach my leading students.

After just a few years of such instruction they often surprise and delight me with the amount of learning they carry within them.

An interesting test of my beliefs occurred when 23 year old Garry Tonon took on Masakazu Imanari, the man most people identified as the most knowledgeable leg locking expert in the world. In his home country of Japan, he is known as "Tenth Dan of leg locks" in recognition of his technical depth. Yet when the action started it was Garry Tonon who easily prevailed, winning via leg lock against the leg locking master himself. The fact that the match was over so quickly and that Garry never made use of top pressure show it was not fatigue due to age or size that got the win - it was knowledge.

Our great nation was founded by revolutionaries who broke from tradition in seeking a better way. I hope to create a revolution in grappling in methods of learning, operations and strategy. Happy fourth from myself and my students

Favorite coaching memories:

One of my favorite coaching memories will always be the second fight between my student Georges St-Pierre and the great double UFC title holder, BJ Penn. The two had fought earlier, with Mr St-Pierre taking a very close decision. By the time of the second clash the overall situation between them had changed considerably.

In the first fight (the first in which I ever cornered Mr St-Pierre), Georges was a youngster fighting towards a title shot and Penn the former champion of the welter weight division who had ventured elsewhere for a range of fights outside the UFC. Since then, Mr St-Pierre had won, lost and re-won his welterweight title and greatly matured as a professional athlete. Mr Penn had taken a stranglehold on the lightweight division where he looked unbeatable.

The two were touted as the two best pound for pound fighters in the world and were

firmly ensconced at the top of their respective divisions. Yet Mr Penn always remembered his time as welterweight champion and how close his previous fight with Mr St-Pierre had been. He pushed hard for a title fight at welterweight. The UFC management recognized the potential in this superfight between two great champions.

The sport itself had changed a lot since the first fight. When they first clashed, the UFC was only just starting to become profitable and emerge out of its long time banishment from cable TV. Now it was one of Americas favorite sports and growing rapidly - both men had become genuine superstars and the interest in the fight was huge. Public interest was greatly bolstered by the UFC's intelligent use of programs showing the preparation for the fight by both athletes, showing their very different training and fighting philosophies and the antagonism between them.

I was as always, responsible for the grappling and fence wrestling coaching in the preparation for the bout. Both aspects had proven critical to victory in the first bout, but this time I wanted to go further. In the dying seconds of their first fight, Mr St-Pierre told me that he felt he could have passed Mr Penn's guard if he just had a few more seconds. Now Mr St-Pierre was only a purple belt in jiu jitsu when they first fought - now he was a solid black belt.

The majority of my coaching time with him had always been spent in positional control and transitions, especially guard passing, as I always thought this was the most beneficial thing for his style of fighting and the amount of time I had to work with him (we live in different countries so I cannot work with him full time). Now you should know that BJ Penn had a guard that was legendarily difficult to pass, indeed, he often mentioned how proud he was of his impassable guard.

He was possessed of extraordinary flexibility along with excellent grappling technique that made him appear to move like liquid in bottom position. The few times he has been taken down in MMA, he used his superb guard work to either effortlessly stand back up to his feet or to sweep his opponents

over or slip brilliantly around behind them to their back - or, in the case of the first fight with Mr St-Pierre, slide into a brilliant submission attempt (gogoplata). At the time of this fight you would have a very hard time finding a single pundit who would disagree with the idea that Mr Penn was the best grappler in MMA.

When I proposed a strategy of actively taking Mr Penn to the ground and looking to pass guard and accumulate damage to the point where Mr Penn became ineffective, people looked at me as though I were mad. Yet there was a logic to my thoughts. Subsequent conversation with Mr St-Pierre reaffirmed his belief that he could have passed Mr Penn's guard at the very end of the first fight. Moreover, research showed that Mr Penn had never successfully submitted an opponent from bottom position - Mr St-Pierre has easily pulled out of his best attempt at a bottom submission when he was just a purple belt.

My only concern was that Mr Penn would be able to stand up from bottom as Georges attempted to pass, or that his extraordinary leg dexterity would prevent Mr St-Pierre from passing and wrap him up to a degree that would prevent him doing any effective damage. I began to work with Mr St-Pierre on a system of MMA guard passing that would nullify Mr Penn's ability to stand up or to use his legs and hips to hold him in guard.

Now the reader should note that guard passing in MMA is significantly different from passing in grappling competition - there are many nuances that would seem strange to a pure grappler, some of which were in evidence that night, that most pundits clearly don't understand. Still, the overall idea is similar and certainly the end result - dominant pins past your opponents defensive legs, are the same.

As the fight camp progressed, Mr St-Pierre trained with his usual verve and enthusiasm. He became extremely adept at passing. When I trained with him, he was able to apply severe passing pressure that made me very confident he would succeed on the big night when striking was factored into the equation. His training with other jiu jitsu athletes, even very high level ones, showed how strong this aspect of his game was

becoming. (On a side note, if I ever told you some of the names of jiu jitsu superstars that Mr St-Pierre has either passed or submitted, you would be quite shocked - many people do not realize how good at pure grappling some of the top level MMA fighters are).

When the big show arrived, public interest was at a fever pitch, to this day it remains the best example in UFC history between two great current champions in their prime, made all the more interesting by the fact that the smaller fighter had previously been champion of the heavier division and that their previous fight had been so close. When the action started however, it was apparent that the mature Georges St-Pierre was a very different man from the young challenger of the first fight. After a tense first round, the takedowns began. Immediately Mr St-Pierre went to test the guard of Mr Penn. In a display of MMA guard passing mastery, Mr St-Pierre passed the impassable guard of BJ Penn six times in approximately 12 minutes of ground action, almost once every two minutes. As he did so he accumulated a fearsome degree of damage on his opponent, drastically reducing his combat effectiveness and leading to a stoppage at the end of round four.

The precision and expertise shown by Mr St-Pierre in this critical aspect of the fight, against such a fine and skilled opponent, will forever remain one of my favorite coaching memories. It displays so much about what I teach to my students, about how clear, rational thinking to solve difficult problems, allied with discipline and hard work along intelligently thought out training plans, can make what seems impossible, look easy. Much has been written about this great fight, between two of the all time greats.

Unfortunately most of it centers around the least important part of it - the grease gate affair. For me however, the most instructive and inspirational aspect will always be this incredible performance in one niche area by one great athlete against another and the lessons it furnishes to us all. Here, Georges St-Pierre initiates one of his six passes that

evening. Note the fine limb positioning by both men to try and nullify the movements of the other - this was truly a clash of young masters.

Problem solving:

Jiu jitsu is a constant solving of problems. Problems come in many forms. If I ask you to divide three hundred and forty two by fourteen, this is a simple problem with a static nature. Once the question is asked, the problem remains the same as you attempt to solve it.

The problems of jiu jitsu are very different. All the problems are dynamic problems. Dynamic problems change as you attempt to solve them. As I attempt to sweep my opponent, I calculate where his center of gravity is in relation to his base of support, but as I get my grips set to begin the sweep, a knowledgeable opponent will see the set up and adjust his base in reaction, thus changing the problem. Moreover, the nature of jiu jitsu problem solving is made vastly more difficult by the fact that not only are the problems dynamic, they are set in a competitive context where I am engaged against another problem solver in a race towards the same prize - submission.

Not only must I solve the ever changing problems in front of me, but I must furnish better answers at a faster rate than my opponent, for as I try to solve the problems he presents to me, so to is he trying to solve the problems I present to him. To further complicate matters, all this has to be done under physical duress.

Unlike a chess player who can sit comfortably in a chair as he solves problems, I have to solve mine whilst engaged in maximal physical exertion and even downright threat to my body. Thus jiu jitsu problem solving is competitive dynamic problem solving under physical duress.

Seen in this light it is of no surprise that this is a sport that breeds endless frustration and a very high drop out rate. Much like life itself, it furnishes many disappointments mitigated by occasional shining triumphs that keep us going and build hope for the future.

The main thing is always to see the sport for what it is - problem solving. The error that so many people make is to see it as a battle between two people whose outcome is determined by factors largely outside of our control. When people lose they attribute it to their opponents size, youth, speed, flexibility, the fact that the opponent has more years of training, comes from a larger, more well known school etc etc. Such thinking will usually result in dropping out of the sport, since we cannot change these factors.

A much healthier way to think is in terms of problem solving. Learn to identify clearly the specific problems that led to failures and look for sound mechanical solutions. Test them in live training and keep developing those solutions that show promise. In this way you learn to attack roadblocks and failures rather than get disillusioned by them. You must learn to see the problems of the sport as PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED, rather than problems to be wept over. This is healthy thinking not only in jiu jitsu, but in every aspect of your life and in my mind, the best and healthiest effect of the sport upon its adherents.

Here, young EBI open weight champion Gordon Ryan and I work on problems and solutions after hard training, one of literally thousands of such sessions that must occur over over the years if progress towards the highest levels is to be made.

Learning curves:

Often I am asked questions about the length of time that will be required to achieve proficiency in jiu jitsu. An interesting corollary to this question is of

great importance to many of the professional athletes that I teach - if I am to compete against an opponent who has trained far longer than me, how can I ever hope to catch up to his level, given the disparity in total training time? On the face of it, it seems impossible.

If athlete A has been training 20 hours per week for ten years and athlete B has been training 20 hours a week for 5 years and A and B are of similar size and body type, it would seem that B ought to have little chance of success. It is my belief that this is not the case. Once an athlete has a strong foundation of the basic movements and concepts in the sport, there can be radical differences in learning curves that can allow for seemingly miraculous acts of catch up where athletes with significantly less total training time can do very well against more experienced opponents.

The most important factor in an athletes training background is NOT length of time training, but rather rate and sustenance of performance improvement. Most coaches and teams simply teach students the same way they were taught themselves, with no thought for improving transmission of knowledge. As a result, many training programs cease being effective in continuing to build new skills after a certain point.

Athletes go into skill stagnation and are more or less the same at ten years as they were at five. An interesting test of my beliefs occurred when my student Eddie Cummings competed in EBI championships. He knew he was slated to fight the outstanding veteran grappler, Baret Yoshida, who had competed very successfully at the highest levels for well over a decade.

Understandably, Mr Cummings was worried that his total training time of only just over five years would not fare well against the highly skilled Mr Yoshida, who had been doing jiu jitsu three times longer than that. Yet on the night, Mr Cummings won with relatively

little trouble despite having only a third of his opponent's total training time - a gratifying vindication of our program.

Body type and jiu jitsu:

Very often people will ask me about the effects of body type on jiu jitsu. It appears that many people hold the belief that there is an optimum body type in jiu jitsu that confers advantage over other body types. Even a moments reflection will reveal that this is false. A look at the medal platform at the world championships will always show a wide variety of body types which are represented in no particular order of success. If I ask you to name for me the five most successful jiu jitsu champions of all time, I guarantee your list will show big disparities in body type. There is no dominant body type on the medal stands. There is however, a dominant body ETHOS.

Champions always maximize the ability of whatever body they were born with to perform the skills of the sport. Whilst there is no one body type that dominates the sport, there is a need on everyone's part to maximize what you can do with your body that will improve your jiu jitsu performance. Everyone's body has an optimal weight and conditioning that maximizes its performance for a given activity. It is your duty to find what that is for you and to maintain yourself close to that ideal (getting closer if competition is near).

Thus any body type can win a world championship, but only one way of maintaining that body of yours will maximize your ability to perform the skills you hope to win that championship with. Here are three EBI champions. All three are very different somatotypes- Garry Tonon is a classic mesomorph. Gordon Ryan an ectomorph and Eddie Cummings an endomorph masquerading as a mesomorph. Yet all three have found a way to maximize their very different bodies to perform the skills they

needed to win. Thus any body type can win a world championship, but only one way of maintaining it will maximize your chances of doing so.

The relationship between MMA and jiu jitsu:

In my teachings I try never to lose sight of the relationship between jiu jitsu and MMA. This is something I inherited from my teacher, Renzo Gracie. My first four teachers and training partners from white to brown belt were Renzo, Ricardo Almeida, Matt Serra and Rodrigo Gracie. All four were both grappling and MMA stand outs. All of our grappling was done in the context of fighting. Indeed, if jiu jitsu had not figured so heavily in early MMA, I never would have taken notice of the art and joined up.

Effectiveness in fighting will always be the most basic appeal of any art that seems to call itself martial. As modern jiu jitsu has matured, the relationship with MMA is slightly more distant. This is a natural consequence of the two sports evolving and pushing in their own directions and the need for specialization to stay ahead of the competition within a specified rule set; but those early years still bear heavily in my thinking and in all honesty, no part of my coaching gets me as excited as helping an athlete prepare for a professional fight. Here, Georges St-Pierre and Kenny Florian go through their grappling drills in our Monday afternoon class.

The power of adaptation:

Very often in the sport we have to adapt our game around changes in our body. Usually these adaptations are in response to injury or age. When one part of our body is incapacitated we have to adapt our game around that problem

and find new ways to play in order to maintain our overall effectiveness. The main thing to remember is that our goal is to continually improve our overall effectiveness in the sport.

It does not matter if I lose some of my best weapons due to injury, so long as I can adapt and create new ones. Sometimes this cycle of adaptation in response to physical changes and problems can have very good effects. An injury can make us play the game in a very new and exciting way; then when the injury resolves itself over time, you get your old weapons back along with your new ones. In my own case, I always favored ashi garami on my left side, but after my hip replacement I completely lost my ability to perform it.

I quickly had to become more proficient on the right hand side in order to demonstrate to my students post surgery. Now it feels as natural as it used to on my left. Here I work for a rather feeble looking ashi garami on my left against the highly skilled Eddie Cummings - the end of my 14 inch surgical scar visible outside my shorts - perhaps one day it will return and I shall be ashi garami ambidextrous

Teaching to teach:

Throughout my coaching career I have always avoided the common tendency to teach with a "do this, do that" approach to jiu jitsu. I always try to teach not only the "how" of a given move, but also the "why." In this way students learn not only the technical performance of the move, but also the contextual elements that show them not only how to use it, but when and why. As I teach my students, I always try to do so in a way that enables them to teach others the same lesson.

I do this by trying to explain the logic and rationale behind each move. I don't want students who can merely

mimic a move, I want students who can understand its underlying principles. Teaching in this manner has a pleasing side effect; not only do students make faster progress in their own games, they rapidly take on the ability to teach these skills to others. Rather than be able to merely regurgitate information, they can explain information - a critical difference.

In this way the overall level of the training room can increase quite rapidly and a mutually beneficial training environment can emerge and take root. Here my student, Garry Tonon shows his pedagogical skills with young Mikey Wilson, an outstanding ten year old student. Garry is explaining the mechanical underpinnings of ude gatame, one of our favorite upper body attacks as young Mikey enacts them.

Defeat:

The only people that never lost are those that never went against the best competition. In life and jiu jitsu, defeat is as certain as death and taxes in other people lives. The question then, is not whether you will be defeated, but how you will react when defeated. Of course the initial reaction is always emotional, but after that comes two general types of reaction.

The first is denial. The athlete tells him or herself that the loss was an aberration due to outside factors, an injury, a distraction, an unfavorable environment or whatever. The loss is dismissed and the athlete goes on doing what he has always done and goes to the next match essentially the same person. The second approach is acceptance. The athlete accepts the defeat as a sign that something needs to be changed if the cause of that defeat is to be overcome.

It may be something small,

or it may be a major overhaul, but some form of modification is necessary. This second approach generally gets the better results in the long term (though many athletes have had good careers using the first). Here Eddie Cummings and his team show the pain of a narrow loss by penalty in over time at the world championships, but already ideas of change and modification are going through our minds

The iron law of posture:

For every given human physical activity, there is a posture that maximizes our ability to successfully complete that activity. This insight is critical to success in physical action. In jiu jitsu our ability to work in accordance with this law is severely tested, since our position and goals can change second by second and everything is done in a competitive environment under duress.

Learning how posture can improve our efficiency, learning how to move from posture to posture in accordance with the unfolding action and learning how posture is related to the goal of minimum effort for maximum effect is the foundation of the truly deep part of the study of jiu jitsu. It is here that we begin to gain deep insight into our physical bodies and their workings. Here Eddie Cummings and his opponent, Tanquinho, both display fine posture relative to their respective goals as they engage in their match at the ADCC world championships

Continuous combat:

The ideal grappler of the future will be able to apply him or herself through the full spectrum of positions from standing to floor. Once combat is begun they

will be able to follow the action effortlessly and confidently from upper body throws to leg takedowns to standing submissions down to the floor in both top and bottom position
- strong in both positional and submission attacks over the whole body.

Currently, most grapplers are specialists who are much better in certain areas than others. This creates a rather artificial or limited look to their game where the action stops as soon as they get to an area outside their speciality. This creates problems when they have to transition to fighting or MMA. Some great figures of the past give a good idea of what is possible for the future. Here is the truly great Isao Okano, who displayed great balance and flow between standing and ground technique of the highest level. Men like him are an inspiration to a future where grapplers exhibit an ability to flow continuously between every scenario in grappling at a high level of proficiency

When the fighting is over:

Garry Tonon finishes another impressive performance. The self analysis that must follow every match has already begun as we reflect on his immediate assessment of the match. His initial feelings and thoughts are the first part of the process. As the next few days unfold, the analysis will deepen into video review and a congress of informed opinions, so that training and behavior can be modified in the light of experience. Only in this way can progress be made over time. Only in this way can an athlete build strength upon strength and put on increasingly better shows. Most people celebrate a win. The best analyze a win and see where improvements can be made so that winning becomes a habit rather than an accident.

Training intensity levels:

One of the best aspects of grappling is that training intensity levels can be varied according to the task at hand. When world championship fights are close, intensity levels rise. When expanding one's skill set is the primary goal, they Lower. One of my favorite applications of lowered intensity levels that provide benefit all around, is the training of children by my senior students.

Pictured is the very talented ten year old, Mikey Wilson. He and his father travel great distances to come and train with me in NYC, exhibiting that dedication and drive that is the foundation of all human accomplishment. Teaching him and watching him roll with the senior students is such a Joy. Like his seniors, I encourage him to try the moves he learns and expand his ever growing arsenal.

Kano's maxim of mutual benefit is fulfilled as young Mikey can move about in ways that expand his technical knowledge and direct him towards a bright future, whilst the seniors get to practice their moves without any recourse to physical strength - forcing them to gain deeper understanding of the mechanical and tactical nature of the game. Here, young Mikey strangles Garry Tonon with fine technique and afterwards relaxes with Gordon Ryan after a splendid training session where both walked away as better jiu jitsu practitioners

Lower body expertise:

Many people ask me how they can progress more rapidly in the sport. There are many parts to any satisfactory answer to such a question, but one that I always mention is this: the people who make the fastest progress in the sport are invariably those who learn early to play mostly with their legs and feet rather than their hands and arms.

We all come from a modern lifestyle that massively emphasizes the use of our upper body over lower body in fine motor skills. Every day we eat, drive and work mostly with our hands. Other than walking/running, the overwhelming majority of our daily tasks are done with the hands and arms. We form a very sophisticated coordination between hands and brain that allows us to perform physically complex tasks such as playing a piano, opening a tin can, changing channel on tv, writing etc.

All of these tasks would be extremely difficult if not impossible for us if we had to do them with our feet and legs. Our feet and legs, relegated to the tasks of walking and running, never develop any fine tuned coordination and remain for most of our lives as the hopeless, bumbling, clumsy relatives of our nimble and dexterous fingers, hands and arms. Then we begin jiu jitsu and find that many of the most important moves require us to move our feet and legs with the dexterity of our hands and arms.

To a person used to doing everything with their upper body, this can be a horrifying experience. Many resist this as long as possible - trying to play the sport with their upper body as much as they can. These people invariably progress at the pace of snails and frequently get frustrated to the point of giving up.

Others make the mental breakthrough early and commit themselves to training their lower body - these people will invariably progress much faster. The key is to understand that the human body is endlessly adaptable and then in time you can develop great dexterity with your legs and feet in ways that will give you a tremendous edge on the Mat.

My inspiration in this area of training comes from an unexpected source far outside the world of jiu jitsu. It comes from people who have no arms. By necessity they gain a dexterity in the lower body that even the best jiu jitsu people can only dream of. I have attached some remarkable footage of one such person - Imagine how easily such

people would learn open guard movements and submissions that require the use of the legs. They show what is possible if we push ourselves hard enough.

Every time I wonder if I am doing enough to train myself in the dexterous use of my feet and legs in ways that would benefit my game, I think of these people and realize I have a long long way to go. If I asked you six months ago to find a photograph of someone attempting a leg lock on the great Rousimar Palhares you would have come up empty handed. Such was his reputation in the area of the game that people would have thought it suicide to even try.

Yet when Garry Tonon engaged him in a match he went forward with confidence and attacked Mr Palhares' legs repeatedly, along with a host of other submission and positional attacks. This was not the result of any suicidal tendencies on Mr Tonon's part. It came from confidence in a system of leg offense and defense he had put a tremendous amount of work into over years.

Despite a huge size and strength disadvantage, he took it to the legendary leg locker and dominated all the leg exchanges. Here he tests Mr Palhares' legs with a powerful inverted Achilles lock variation that puts great pressure on the big man. Real confidence comes from knowing you have the answers to all the problems you can reasonably expect out there under the lights and the physical preparation to manifest them.

Transmission of knowledge:

Sometimes people tell me that the only reason my leg lock system works so well for my students is because they train with me twice a day every day - each time under my personal supervision. In fact this is not the case. If my system was so complex that it required constant monitoring by me over vast amounts of training time, this would reflect badly upon the system itself.

Any effective combat

system ought to be relatively simple if it is to be effective under the stress of combat.

This simplicity should allow the knowledge to be easily transmitted to others, who in turn

should be able to teach it to other people who have never met or trained under me at

all. An interesting test of this notion occurred yesterday in far away South Africa.

My student Kurdt George, teaches at an affiliate school in Cape Town where he teaches

jiu jitsu (in between running away from great white sharks, crocodiles, black mambas,

lions, hyenas, honey badgers and African killer bees). Kurdt has been faithfully traveling all the way to NYC several times a year for many years now. He studies very

precisely the game that I teach, taking it back home and showing it to his ever growing

numbers of students.

Yesterday, at the biggest local grappling event, Unanimous - a sub only 16 man elimination format featuring teams from around the area, Kurdt's students won the event

overall and racked up eight submissions, all via heel hook - easily the most impressive

submission performance of the day. It provides an excellent example of a conscientious

and dedicated student taking a system and transmitting it to others with no external

support and getting great results. Here is one of his students working the system in a pattern that I am sure many of you will recognize.

Three forms of body control:

There are three major forms of control over the movements

of the human body. The first is control over the movements of our own body. The human body has a vast potential for movement which very few people learn to fully exploit in the course of a lifetime. Sports such as gymnastics, yoga, solo dance, contortionism and others teach the student how to maximize their body's ability to move

through its full potential range.

Their goal is to teach control over the movements of our own body. A second form of control is seen in partner dance, professional (fake) wrestling and other such cooperative activities. Here the intention is to work with a cooperative partner and demonstrate control over the movement of two cooperating bodies. The two work as a unit and try to exhibit control over their shared movement through whatever art form they are trying to express. The third form of control is to me the most interesting.

This is control over a the body of a resisting opponent who is simultaneously trying to control you. Now you have to control someone who does not want to be controlled, but who on the contrary, seeks to control you. That is when things get truly interesting. The key is to understand that the grappling arts, jiu jitsu included, must involve training in all three areas if progress is to be maximized. Students must make sincere efforts to maximize their control over the movements of their own bodies.

This can be done with gymnastics and yoga or some other equivalent. Remember always - THERE IS NO LEARNING TO CONTROL THE MOVEMENTS OF ANOTHER PERSONS BODY, WITHOUT FIRST LEARNING TO CONTROL THE MOVEMENTS OF YOUR OWN. Jiu jitsu also involves the second form of control, over a cooperating partner. This is done during partner drilling, where movement skills are learned with an a partner who assists you through the movements until they are understood and natural.

Lastly comes control over resisting opponents in live sparring (randori) and ultimately, competition. Thus the jiu jitsu student must familiarize himself with all three faces of body control of he or she is to make a deep study of the sport.

Inside the mind of Eddie Cummings as he walks out to another match:

"Coach has been watching me train every day in fight camp. He knows my game inside out. I've memorized all the complex names and code words for the moves so I can react instantly when he calls for them. He knows my game better than I know myself - I will move exactly as he calls the moves and victory will be mine..." Inside the mind of John Danaher: "Dang...I forgot this kid's name again...was it Eddie Bravo? No - that's that rubbery dude from California - different guy. Ummm...Poindexter? No. Damn...maybe someone in the crowd will know...what is his game? Never can remember...wait...I think he mostly does half guard passing...yes, that's it...ok, this should be fine..."

Body asymmetries in jiu jitsu:

Students often ask me if they ought to perfect the various moves of jiu jitsu equally on both sides of their body. They are generally surprised when I say no. You do need to have strong attacks and defense on both left and right sides, but that does not imply that you ought to practice each and every move equally on both sides. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of champions in the sport heavily favor one side of their body for each given move.

If I have a very good rear strangle with my right arm, but a poor one with my left, it is easier and less time consuming for me to learn some simple transitional tricks to ensure I can always move my opponent into a right arm strangle when I get behind him, than it is to learn and perfect the rear strangle with my left arm. Our bodies are not symmetrical, it makes sense that our jiu jitsu game will reflect this fact. Now we must not confuse two issues here. We must be effective on both sides, but we

can be effective in very different ways on both sides. Saying that I don't need to have equal efficacy in all my favorite moves on both sides is NOT saying that I can have a strong and weak side overall.

Let us look at the example of escaping side pins. I don't know which side my opponent will pass towards - I don't control that as much as he does. Accordingly, I must have effective escapes from side pins on both sides of my body. I might have a very strong elbow escape on my right hand side, but a weak one on my left. I can make up for this deficiency by (for example) having a very strong side escape to my knees on the left hand side - thus I am effective on both sides, I just use different methods.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the notion of practicing all moves on both sides (my student Georges St-Pierre is fanatical about this). My point is that it is not necessary as evidenced by the fact that most champions have strongly asymmetrical games. Nor is it time efficient, as most moves can be put in the context of a simple set up that will carry the opponent into a position where he can easily be attacked on your strong side. Those set ups are generally much easier to learn than the much more time consuming route of mastering the complete move on the other side.

Here I demonstrate an example with the guillotine strangle. I have a respectable high elbow guillotine on my right side, but a poor one on my left. I make up for this by the fact that I have respectable arm-in guillotine strangle on my left side, though a poor one on my right. Thus I can perform a respectable guillotine on both sides - just different versions. In this way the physical asymmetries in my body that could potentially create problems for my guillotine attacks, can be overcome.

Building a culture of respect:

One of the favorite moments of my coaching career occurred at the ADCC world championships. My student Garry Tonon squared off against the very talented Dillon Danis, student of the great Marcelo Garcia. The two had a rivalry and met in the first round of the tournament. After a fierce exchange of technique, Mr Tonon prevailed with a very powerful heel hook.

In a gesture that made me far more proud than the actual victory, Mr Tonon immediately went over to check if his rival was alright, then went to bow and shake the hand of his great coach and mentor - showing his respect for all his wonderful achievements in the sport. I dare say that that bow and handshake made me more proud than all the leg locks, armlocks and strangles my students have performed put together.

Respect for an opponent is the foundation of the martial arts. It is what distinguishes the martial arts from mere violence. If a man fights another with hate in his heart - it is a fight. If he does so with respect in his heart - he is a martial artist. Remember - in the end, whatever trivial differences there are between teams and schools, they are insignificant compared with the many similarities- there is so much more that unites us than separates us. Building a culture of respect is the basis of our enterprise.

What is so special about the ground:

A distinguishing characteristic of almost all grappling arts is the aim of getting an opponent down to the ground. Even grappling styles that focus primarily upon the standing position, such as modern Olympic judo and Olympic freestyle wrestling, still have as the primary aim the skill of getting an opponent down to the ground.

A natural question to ask is - what is so special about the ground? Why do all grappling

styles have this common feature? None of the striking styles of martial arts have any serious ground work, indeed, the action is almost always stopped the second one person hits the floor.

The answer is simple. Controlling an opponent's movement is much easier on the floor

than in the standing position. Why? In any case where you are dealing with an opponent

who is completely naive with regards grappling skill, it is usually due to the fact that human movement is very different on the ground than it is in upright, bipedal situations.

Most people spend the vast majority of their working lives in standing or sitting positions. The only time they spend on the floor is during sleep. As a result they develop

good movement skills in standing position, but as they age they generally lose the movement skills on the floor that they had as babies. The result is that any time they are

put down to the ground they tend to thrash about uselessly and quickly exhaust themselves.

Even when two experienced grapplers work on the floor, their movements will inevitably

be much slower and less explosive than their movements in the standing position due to

the fact that they carry each other's body weight, their movement is hampered by the

grips that they have on each other and that our body's ability to generate kinetic energy

is far less on the floor than in standing position, where we can generate much faster movement (picture two men trying to throw a discus, one standing and one on his back -

who will throw it further?).

So whenever CONTROL OVER ANOTHER PERSONS MOVEMENT IS THE GOAL - getting that person to the ground is the sensible option.

This is a universal truth that goes far outside grappling sports. It is seen in many different areas. When police wish to handcuff and subdue an unruly suspect, the first

thing they do is put him on the floor. When Cowboys brand a steer - do they do it on a

standing steer?

Of course not. That would be suicidal on such a powerful beast. The

first thing they do is binds its legs and put it down on the ground, where even a mighty

steer can be handled with ease. When lions take on dangerous prey, their first move is to tackle it down to the ground so they can control it long enough to set a strangle hold.

Everywhere you look, when controlling the movement of a dangerous, explosive opponent is goal - putting them down to the ground is the order of the day.

In jiu jitsu we see one of the clearest examples of the efficacy of ground control in controlling human movement. Look at any random beginner class and you will see how

inept the average adult modern human is in locomotion on the ground. This fault can

readily be taken advantage of in a crises situation. It is vital therefore, that the student

devote much time to the study of efficient movement on the floor.

Doing so will

distinguish you from the common run of people and set you up for long term success in

the sport. The common movement patterns associated with efficient ground movement,

bridging, shrimping, building a base etc etc, must be thoroughly studied and mastered

early in your studies.

Understanding of the correct mechanics underlying the lock that will make the move

Work in the pressure of competition

Anybody can train when they feel like training - The real question is whether you can

train when you don't feel like it: Eddie Cummings and I hammer out details and plans for

his upcoming bouts. This constant pushing for better results comes at a price. You see

the gym is empty behind us. A few hours previously it was packed with nearly eighty

people in an afternoon class - now they are gone- but Mr Cummings remains.

This pattern of extra effort beyond the norm is the distinguishing characteristic of all great enterprises. So often people ask me how my students became so adept at the skills they display in competition - if they could see the daily price they pay in time and effort their question would be answered before it even left their lips...

Competition intensity:

The majority of training time ought to be concerned with skill acquisition. Accordingly, I often encourage my students to train in an experimental manner where the primary emphasis is on attaining and developing new skills. This is best done by reducing the intensity of training sessions to a level where thinking and learning can occur. It is a very different matter during contest preparation and match time however. Now the athlete operates to impose those skills on a maximally resisting subject. Opponents are often shocked at the intensity of a grappler highly skilled in submissions coming at them with bad intentions.

Things get much more interesting when the intent changes from "I will pass your guard or sweep you into a pin and control you," to "I am coming to break or strangle you." Here, Eddie Cummings shows his competition intensity to win yet another EBI championship belt for the squad. The remarkable achievements of Michael Bisping: When Michael Bisping stepped into the octagon last Saturday night, few in attendance or watching on screen gave him much chance of victory - and seemingly with good reason.

Not too long ago, Mr Bisping had lost a one sided fight via submission to Luke Rockhold, the new champion of the division - and Mr Rockhold seemed only to have improved since then. Yet just a few minutes into the action, Mr Bisping threw a splendid left hook that dropped Mr Rockhold

and followed with an expertly applied finishing sequence that gained him a TKO victory that was as convincing as it was unexpected.

The most obvious result of the match was that he is the new middleweight champion of the world. Much less publicized, but of no less importance, is the fact that Mr Bisping stands on the precipice of an achievement as great as his championship belt. With this victory, he tied Georges St-Pierre for the record of most wins in the octagon at nineteen victories. This is an incredible achievement and one which has largely flown under the radar of both fans and media. When most people throw around names of the greatest fighters of all time, Mr Bisping's name is rarely mentioned, yet here he is, about to surpass the number of victories of all the all time greats.

Even more impressive is that throughout all this, Mr Bisping remained an outspoken opponent of steroid use that was rampant during his much of career. More than half of his losses were to fighters who subsequently failed steroid tests or who used medically prescribed testosterone - he was a clean fighter in what is often a very unclean sport. When I coach MMA fighters I often preach the "dominance/competence" model of training and athlete preparation. This is the idea that in order for an athlete to become a world champion MMA fighter they must be highly competent in all skills of the sport and in addition, they must be the best in the world at one or two specific skills.

For example, an athlete who I am often associated with is Georges St-Pierre. He was highly competent in all areas of the sport, but in addition he was for most of his career, the best in the world at striking into a takedown and also achieving positional dominance and control on the floor that enabled him to unleash powerful and prolonged striking attacks from top position. In this way he gained and held a world title.

Mr Bisping appears to have made use of a very different model. While he is highly

competent in all areas of the sport, he cannot claim to be the best in the world at any one

or two skills. On the contrary, the impression he gives is one of a fighter who is very good at everything without being great at anything. Yet here he is - standing atop a trifecta of middleweight greatness. First, he is the new champion of one of the UFC's toughest divisions.

Second, he is on the cusp of becoming the man with the most wins in UFC history and is already the middleweight with the most wins in UFC history.

Third,

he recently defeated the fighter usually described as the greatest in the middleweight

division's history, Anderson Silva. Clearly whatever he is doing works and works extremely well.

Where did this greatness come from? How is it still unnoticed and unappreciated by so

many fans? It appears that Mr Bisping has worked through his career using a very different model of progress toward a championship belt. We might call it "time/adversity/opportunity" model. Mr Bisping has a very high level of all round competence in the sport- there are no glaring weaknesses in his game to be taken advantage of. This is evidenced by his tremendous win rate against non championship

level fighters. This kept him as a top five contender for almost the entirety of his long

career in the sport.

As such he was never out of contention for a title shot. He spent huge amounts of time as a top five or ten fighter, never falling in the rankings below elite

level, even during his career setbacks. Now it is important that we mention these career

setbacks, as they defined much of the fans impressions of Mr Bisping and also the nature of his career.

Almost every time he fought a past UFC or

Pride champion, Mr Bisping lost. Thus was an impression built that he was very good up

to a certain level, but lacked championship level skills. To his great credit however, Mr

Bisping always recovered quickly from these championship adversities. He is one of a

handful of UFC fighters with long careers who have never lost two fights in a row. This

crucial ability to overcome disappointment and adversity to come back strong ensured that he stayed in contention for very long periods of time.

It was inevitable that if he stayed in the championship picture long enough, one day fortune would deliver the opportunity for what he had craved so long. That fortune came

in the shape of injuries to Chris Weidman and Ronaldo Sousa - two the leading contenders in the division. By keeping this overall winning record intact over time and recovering from setbacks and adversity, Mr Bisping could play a waiting game for circumstances to align in a way that offered an opportunity for the coveted title shot. Now opportunity is one thing - having the courage and confidence to act upon it is quite another.

Mr Bisping showed truly commendable self belief in taking a fight on very short notice against the man who had soundly defeated him previously. Thus did a man who

had shown a high degree of all round competence and professionalism throughout his

career that kept him a perennial contender, but who had lacked the eye catching skills

of a world beater in any one area, find himself in position to become king. Maligned all

of his career as a weak puncher, he found KO power when he needed it most and walked away as new champion.

There is something inspirational about this story of a man who truly worked his way to

the top over twelve years of professional fighting - without the sensational athlete-specific skills we normally associate with world champions. He got there by hard

work that created consistent success at non championship level; along with the mental

strength to get past the set backs he suffered against championship level fighters, until

opportunity allied with self belief gave him his chance.

Operating without the technical

and tactical dominance in crucial areas that we typically associate with world beaters,

he is now on the verge of overcoming many of the records and achievements of the greatest fighters in the sport. Like so many others, I thought it very unlikely that he

would realize his dream when he stepped into the octagon for his first title shot after a decade of fighting in the UFC. Rarely has it been so inspiring and enlightening to have been proven so wrong.

Encouraging creativity:

One of the hardest things for a coach to master is the balancing of the need to impose a direction and vision upon a training program, while at the same time, giving room for individual creativity and style to the athletes. Too often I see programs that churn out a team of cookie cutter clones of their sensei. They are all taught the same approach despite massive differences in body type and Psychology.

The unfortunate result is a stifling of individualism and self expression. An interesting element of the three most well known grapplers that I coach is that they share my vision - a relentless game of control leading to submission, but have very different ways of expressing it. This is due to the fact that I teach a very wide array of moves, including a great many that are not part of my own game. I allow advanced students to pick and choose on their own. Over time, their own unique game will begin to crystallize and take shape.

I have a general vision of the sport - if people like it, they will come to me to learn, if not, they will go elsewhere, where a different vision is taught. Once I begin teaching them at advanced level, most of the emphasis is upon getting them to express themselves as they express my general vision.

Consider an analogy:

two generals wish their men to take a certain hill that is occupied by enemy forces. They share a common goal - they both want to take the hill. The first

general uses a system of micro management. His soldiers are given minute by minute

instructions from which they are not allowed to deviate. If they run into expected resistance at certain points, they must radio back for new instructions. If they see spontaneous opportunities for success, they cannot take them, but must follow the initial

orders to the letter. In other words, the first general dictates not only the end of the mission, but also the all the means to that end.

The second general only specifies the end of the mission - take the hill - but does not

specify the means by which they do so. Instead, he gives responsibility to the junior officers to make individual decisions based upon their growing knowledge and experience, so that if they run into problems or see unexpected opportunities, they can

immediately react to them.

One will be a micro managed army that is only as good as the general who leads them.

The second will be a genuine team with a flexibility, spontaneity and individuality that

the first will never know. It is my contention that the second end-centered method produces better results than overly strict means and ends methods. At the same time, it is better for the athletes as people and indeed, the sport overall. Here I work on fine tuning to the game of Garry

Tonon, one of the most free spirited and unique athletes I ever had the pleasure of training.

Former adversaries, new friends:

Georges St-Pierre and Jake Shields finish up a tough day of training with the squad. They fought in front of one of the biggest crowds in UFC history. Today they trained and laughed together in front of a crowded room. Both times it was a wonderful time to be around Garry Tonon has just informed me that the new super villain in

Star Wars: the force awakens is a total panty-waist dork who disgraces the fine lineage of Darth Sideous, Darth Maul and Darth Vader with a lamentable display of overall wimpiness and utter lack of spine. Mr Tonon's assessment of Mr. Kylo Ren's combat value as "completely incapable of winning a novice division at NAGA, forget about beating a Jedi," leaves me inconsolable and distraught as caught on camera...

An early innovation in my jiu jitsu:

When I was a blue belt in the early mid 1990's I made the observation that almost every strangle hold in our sport has an inverted or reverse variation, except (at that time) kata gatame (often called an arm triangle strangle). At the same time, my friend Shawn Williams came to me with a problem related to guard passing when opponents would scramble to their knees in a quasi front headlock position to avoid conceding pass points. At this time I was experimenting a lot with wrestling moves like three quarter nelsons and their applicability to jiu jitsu.

This marriage of seemingly unrelated topics spurred me to try an inverted kata gatame as a counter to an opponent scrambling up to turtle position- I would break them down with a three quarter Nelson and enter this new strangle. Mr Williams told me it felt very effective - at that same moment I also came up with the idea of a front kata gatame (anaconda strangle), but I later learned that I could not claim originality with this move as it was common in the sport of wrestling to apply it as a strangle even though technically this was illegal - the gold medal winning Schultz brothers were famous for this.

I showed the move to Renzo , who wanted a proof that it was effective - I performed it on a strongly resisting partner who of course did not know the move and promptly passed out. Renzo laughed, got up and got the same result when he applied it to another man - thus was born what I called "the inverted kata gatame" I went on to experiment over the months with many variations of entry and finish with considerable

success. I showed it to my friend and student, Joe D'arce, who quickly became very proficient in its use, particularly out of guard passing scrambles.

He competed in

California and quickly defeated many opponents with it. The Californians had never seen this strangle and called the move "the D'arce" after Joe - something we both still

laugh about to this day. Here my student, Chris Weidman - a true specialist in the technique, applies it brilliantly to render his opponent, Tom Lawlor, unconscious in a matter of seconds on his title run towards Anderson Silva

The development of my leg lock system:

Many people ask me about the development of the leg lock system that Gordon Ryan, Eddie Cummings and Garry Tonon have used with so much success in competition. When I started jiu jitsu in the early-mid 1990's, leg

locks were largely dismissed in the jiu jitsu community, even though the rules of the sport actually permitted more variation in leg lock attacks than does sport sambo - a grappling style with a reputation for being leg lock-centric.

The reasons given for this dismissal of leg locking were strange and even self contradictory. Leg locks it was claimed, were ineffective, yet at the same time, too dangerous to be trained safely. They would prevent students from learning to pass guard, even though many leg locks could be applied from positions that had nothing to do with guard passing.

People were constantly warned that if a leg lock failed, the result would be a loss of top position that could be disastrous - even though exactly the same logic could be applied to many armlocks and strangles. Leg locks were even dismissed as cowardly, a form of cheap shot in the noble art of jiu jitsu - even though no other form of submission suffered from this perception, a very odd perception, given that the whole purpose of the sport was to submit people.

In truth, all these reasons were spurious. The real reason was simple to understand. If

you look at jiu jitsu as a system - the basis of that system can be roughly stated thus:

When on top, seek to take your opponent down to make control easier, then get past his

legs to lessen his ability to attack you from underneath or get back to his feet. Work your way through a hierarchy of pins, each one offering better and better opportunity to

control your opponent as you strike him on the ground. When you have reached the zenith of the hierarchy, submit him. If on bottom, recover to a position where you can

use your legs (guard) to control an opponent and submit him if he makes a mistake and

exposes himself, or sweep him to get on top and apply the above formula. Now ask yourself a simple question:

Where do leg locks fit into that system? The answer is also simple - leg locks are to be

used when the system FAILS. If you can't get the system to work on a difficult opponent,

try a leg lock, perhaps that will catch him by surprise and gain you victory. That is why

they were seen as cheap shots - they were an admission that you could not beat your

opponent within the system, so you went outside it. To use a leg lock was to admit a failure in your ability to apply the system of jiu jitsu. As such, they were to be seen as

desperation moves to be pulled out of the hat when nothing else was working. This was

the status of leg locks when I entered the sport.

There was so much to learn as a white and blue belt that I was not bothered initially by

this imbalance of upper body submissions over lower body and the general dismissal of

leg attacks. As I spent more time in the sport, however, I observed the efficiency of leg

locking through the work of professional fighters such as Rumina Sato among others.

Also distinguished visitors to the academy brought with them different styles and methods. One of them was a young Dean Lister who had some early success in grappling competition with leg locks.

His leg lock game was still in development at that stage- mostly based around Achilles locks rather than the advanced heel hook game he would later develop and become famous for. Mr Lister encouraged me to add study of leg locks to my game. Thankfully my teacher, Renzo Gracie, was very open minded and never prohibited the study and use of leg locks in the gym. Accordingly I began to earnestly study the people most associated with leg locking skill. They had some impressive elements to their game, but also many deficiencies - as evidenced by the fact that few grappling or MMA matches of that time were decided by leg lock.

Training

in the gym showed me that leg locks had considerable potential, but the manner in which they were standardly taught at the time made them rather easy to defend. I began an intense study of the foundation of the most high percentage leg locks - ashi garami. I developed many variations of this position that interlocked with each other in dynamic situations under the assumption that an opponent knew the main methods of escape from the standard position.

As months turned into years, I arrived at a sophisticated system of leg and hip controls based around ashi garami that I used with considerable success in the gym. None of my students at that time chose to compete (sometimes I wonder if my own decision never to compete influenced them in this regard). I was known only through my coaching of MMA fighters, where the circumstances and emphasis were very different. When my focus on MMA diminished due to the encroaching retirement of Georges St-Pierre and less involvement with Chris Weidman after he moved further out into Long Island and opened his own school, I began to focus more on pure grappling competition. I had the immensely good fortune to meet Eddie Cummings, Garry Tonon and Gordon Ryan. These three were definitely interested in competition and unlike my MMA students, lived

in the area so they could train twice a day seven days a week year round. I immediately

put them on a development program that was heavy in submissions and in particular leg

locks. Such gifted and hard working students quickly learned the main concepts and gained greatly in confidence with early successes in local competition. Soon they developed a very unique style that had people talking and they were pushed into higher

levels of competition. A fascinated jiu jitsu community could see that there was something new being done here - these were not desperation attacks done when nothing else was working; nor did they rely upon the naivety of the opponent to succeed

- opponents could know what was happening, know the standard counters, and still be

crushed from any position.

For the first time, people were watching a control based leg lock game, rather than an

opportunistic or desperation based one. It had its own positional hierarchy, just like conventional jiu jitsu, only in an area that had been ignored for decades. Like most new

ideas, the leg lock system has its detractors, it's false prophets and its advocates. The

clash between these distracts people from the real value of this change - that a significant advance towards the ideal of jiu jitsu - control that leads to submission - has

been made. It can help many students towards that ideal, as it did mine. That does not

mean I want everyone to drop what they are doing and immerse themselves in leg locks

- most of the current world champions use them sparingly and they do very well without

them. Many people prefer the traditional approach and have excellent reasons for doing

so. However, this new direction does offer very interesting possibilities that align well

with the basic philosophy of our beloved sport and which can be of

Immense benefit to motivated students who enjoy the new directions it offers.

Here, Eddie Cummings displays fine form with a very destructive heel hook from a variation of ashi garami on his Russian opponent at the ADCC world championships, earning honors for the fastest submission of the tournament.

Stranglehold or chokehold? My long suffering students will attest that I often show a fastidiousness that can make me a rather unpleasant person to be around at times

□ A □ one mistake that is guaranteed to evoke a nasty reaction is the very

common tendency for students of jiu jitsu to confuse strangleholds and chokes. It is of the greatest importance that students gain a deep understanding of the workings of the human body - this is an art - and your canvas is the human body - learn as much as you can about it and your jiu jitsu will improve. A choke refers to the act of obstructing the passage of air to the lungs. So for example, if you swallow food too clumsily, you can be choked. Strangulation refers to the very different action of restricting blood to the brain, usually by constricting the carotid arteries in the neck. Chokes can take up to several minutes to render a well conditioned person unconscious. Strangles will do the same in around ten seconds. Due to the fact that the airways are in close proximity to the carotid arteries, most strangleholds will also incidentally have a choking effect and vice versa - but always it is the intention of the jiu jitsu player to strangle, rather than choke, an opponent due to the much greater efficiency of the former. Therefore, it ought to be standard practice to refer to our attacks to the neck as strangles rather than chokes (and please avoid the nonsensical phrase "blood choke") Here, young Nicky Ryan works on his strangles - a move he and his brother show great proficiency in, while his notoriously nit-picky and obsessive sensei looks on approvingly

The primacy of strangles:

The submission holds of our sport are broadly divided into joint locks (kansetsu -waza) and strangleholds (shime- waza). I, along with many other instructors, believe that strangle holds have a special status above joint locks. There are several reasons for this. First, strangles give the jiu jitsu fighter a very wide range of force to apply against an opponent. The mere threat of a strangle applied from dominant position can be used to pacify an unruly but inexperienced antagonist in a low intensity fight. As the intensity of conflict increases, strangles can be used with a very high

degree of safety to render an attacker unconscious and thus easily controlled. In a truly intense situation, strangles can do something that no joint lock can do - end a life. Thus they can be used with an intensity that is easily modified to the situation you find yourself in. Joint locks on the other hand, require you to damage the joint to the point where your opponent cannot continue to resist. This may not always be the kind of solution you want to the situation you find yourself in. Thus strangles offer much greater flexibility of use and ultimately far greater lethality than joint locks. Second, strangles will work as effectively on the most determined resistance as they do on the lightest resistance. No amount of willingness to take pain and punishment and continue fighting will work against a well applied strangle. Show me the toughest, most pain resistant, devil-may-care maniac on the planet; put him in a tight stranglehold, and I will show you a man who will be sleeping like a baby ten seconds from now. I have seen men with badly broken arms and even legs keep fighting, but you will never see a man fighting through unconsciousness. Accordingly, we must award a special status to strangleholds and study very diligently, perhaps more than any other form of submission, not only the proper mechanics of their application, but also methods of getting to, and exposing an opponent's neck, and staying there long enough to apply a solid strangle. It is for this reason that I still believe that the fundamental positional game of jiu jitsu is of such immense value and must always be the foundation of the sport- without positional skills to move around the opponents body and form solid connection to it, the jiu jitsu fighter will not be able to get to the positions required for strangles, the most reliable and versatile submissions in our arsenal. I am known as a coach who strongly emphasizes the ability to lock in effective submission holds on the entire body, but if I were forced to choose only one form of submission to train for the rest of my life (May God protect me from ever having to make such an choice ☐) - I would unquestionably choose strangles (shime waza) over joint locks (kansetsu waza) and thus the prerequisite

positional skills required to make them effective. Here, Garry Tonon shows superb positioning and control into a perfectly applied strangle on the way to victory in another big grappling event

Off the mat:

When most people think of the life of a martial artist, they immediately think of the time spent on the mat and in competition or fighting, since these are the most distinctive elements of the lifestyle. The truth is however, that no matter how tough your daily training regimen, you will spend many more hours off the mat than on. Accordingly, it is of the first importance that your lifestyle off the mat be paid as much attention as your performance on the mat. In this regard, I know of no better example than Georges St-Pierre. More than anyone else I know, he exhibited the martial virtues in every aspect of his life in ways that often made me, his so called teacher, burn with shame at the inadequacies of my own behavior. Throughout his career he carried himself in daily life with a warmth and generosity of spirit that endeared him to all he met. No matter how tired, stressed or absorbed he was was, he always had time for a smile and photo with his fans. Sometimes fan behavior was, whether from ignorance or arrogance, far below what it ought to be (on some occasions to the point where I was ready to attack) yet always he was implacable and warm. Picture yourself in his shoes. On a truly bad day - all you want is to be alone, and a crowd of people want to talk and take photos with you. Would you pass this test of patience and kindness? I know I would fail nine times out of ten. Yet Georges, to his everlasting credit, passed every single time for well over a decade. We live in an age where the most successful method of garnering attention in the game that can be monetized is through trash talking. The popularity of UFC stars today is determined largely through their ability to engage in

disparaging talk about their opponents whilst arrogantly proclaiming their own prowess.

The irony is that most of the athletes who engage in this behavior are not actually like

this at all - it is all an act. Yet even as an act it runs contrary to the underpinning of the

martial arts, which is to sublimate violence into a socially positive framework that keeps

a citizenry strong and ready for challenges, yet avoids the antisocial elements of violence that can destroy the fabric of society. Georges could very easily have taken this route - it would have doubled his income and the viewership of his fights. Yet he never did. He became the most watched and financially successful fighter of his immediate era without ever resorting to the behavior most associated with success in

the industry. He stayed true to who he was and never put on an act that was neither

him, nor represented the martial tradition that he stood for. This young man best represented the dichotomy of the martial arts. He fought the toughest men on the planet

in the toughest sport, yet through it all remained a gentleman who exhibited all the social graces that take society forward for the better. Most fighters work diligently on

skills that make them feared. Yet he overcame them all whilst exhibiting behavior that

made him loved rather than feared. One of many lessons this great man taught me is

that ultimately it is far more important to be loved than to be feared. Fear lasts as long

as you are the toughest man in the room and disappears the moment you are not. Love

lasts much longer and creates bonds that the fearsome will never know.

Always ask

yourself of your daily regimen; how much of my training is to instill fear in others and

how much to instill love? The life of the martial artist will never be complete without both

Travis Stevens and the soul of the martial arts:

It is with considerable pride and happiness that I learned this memorial weekend of the outstanding success of my friend and student, Travis Stevens. Travis won the world Judo masters tournament - an elite invitational tournament where the world's best are pitted against each other in one of the toughest events of the year to win (in jiu jitsu, masters events are the old age events - not in this case). Travis embodies much of what I take to be the deep soul of the martial arts. He is truly one of the hardest working athletes I have ever met. When I asked him to be part of one of Georges St- Pierre's training camps he immediately agreed and became one of the best and most valued members. He would drive up from Boston four hours and cross the border to be first man on the mat and last to leave. Then he would immediately drive back to Boston to do the evening Judo workout under the great Jimmy Pedro. Even Georges, a man of tremendous drive, would often comment approvingly on his discipline and work ethic. Like a true friend, Travis always tries to give as much or more than he takes in a relationship - he came to learn the ground game, but always we benefit from his insight and prowess in the standing game. Whenever Travis comes to town to train with the squad the room crackles with extra energy and verve. He does all this with little to no expectation of financial reward as Judo is not a lucrative sport here in America. I always find it disturbing that a man as tough, skilled and hard working as Travis should make but a fraction of the money as the pampered stars of the far less demanding sports that dominate our public consciousness. Like a true martial artist, Travis works through a stunningly grueling training and competition schedule that would crush the stars of these other sports - with only the love of his art to drive him. Through it all, he keeps an all American optimism and contagious vitality that is a joy to be around and to be inspired by. The first day I

met Travis Stevens he applied himself very well and spoke to me after class. He said,
"John, don't teach me jiu jitsu for judo - just teach me jiu jitsu." He launched himself into
the study of the new sport and soon excelled in it. Now he mixes the two brilliantly. In
his victory at the world masters this weekend he used a dynamic mix of tachi waza (standing technique) and ne waza (ground technique) to break through to the winners
place on the podium. Here is my favorite image of Travis in action - it tells so much about this man of the mats - All American, all Budo - built to last. Next time you feel tired
or apathetic about training picture this image and ask yourself if you really have an excuse to keep you off the mats...

Solo movement drills:

Some of the most impressive training lessons I learned came from watching great boxers go through their solo movement training - shadow boxing.
They approached this part of their training with great seriousness. Indeed, it occupied a
considerable part of their overall workout and was done with a commitment and sense
of purpose that was deeply impressive to me. This stands in stark contrast to the rather
lazy fashion in which most grapplers approach solo drills. Usually they are done in a very perfunctory way prior to partner drills before class as a warm up. There is none of
the mindfulness, sense of technical perfection and most important - relevance to actual
sparring - that was so evident in the shadow boxing of the great pugilists. This experience led me to develop grappling solo drills that were designed to improve movement in ways that would make a difference in live training just as quality shadow
boxing improves the sparring of good boxers. Time invested in this project will serve you
well - it will give you so much more than just a warm up. It will deepen your understanding of efficient movement in ne waza (ground grappling), reinforce good

habits of posture and placement and enable you to workout effectively whenever you are alone. Here, young Nicky Ryan goes through his solo drills just prior to stepping on to the mat in competition

The two faces of jiu jitsu:

Every aspect of jiu jitsu has two sides - a positive side where my intention is to enforce my game upon my opponent, and a negative side where I attempt to prevent my opponent doing the same to me. So for example, in a grip fighting exchange, I try to impose my grips upon my opponent, whilst simultaneously negating his attempts to impose his grips upon me. When I pin someone and look to transition from one pin to another, I aim to position and hold myself in a way that maximizes my ability to move freely around my opponent, whilst at the same time doing my utmost to inhibit movement in my opponent. This dual nature of enhancing my aims while undercutting and negating those of my opponent is a key element of victory. Note that one without the other is without value. If I only care to impose my game without shutting down my opponents, he can move as freely as me and the result will be uncontrolled scrambles leading nowhere. If I only seek to negate what my opponent does without any positive movement and attacks of my own. I will never amount to anything more than an annoyance to my opponent by slowing him down without ever actually presenting any danger to him Here, Eddie Cummings exhibits a fine example of this duality. He has attained a position where he can readily move his body in the appropriate directions to apply crushing force to the leg of 10th planet black belt champion, Nathan Orchard, while at the same time completely eliminating Mr Orchard's ability to move in a way that would allow escape. This creates a huge imbalance in movement potential that leads to decisive victory.

Empirical tests:

Nothing furnishes proof of a theory or set of beliefs quite like a simple yet decisive empirical test. Jiu jitsu often allows for very decisive tests due to the nature of submissions. This often makes way for a very clear testing of the pros and cons of a given system versus alternative systems. Here Eddie Cummings quickly latches on to the leg of noted leg lock practitioner Reilly Bodycomb and secures a decisive win - validating the effectiveness of our system in a very clear empirical test.

Skepticism and leg locks:

One of the most valuable traits a person can have is a healthy sense of skepticism. The skeptical mindset is one of the pillars of the scientific method; all proposed theories are treated with skepticism until sufficient verification is accumulated before the scientific community will provisionally accept it as confirmed. One of the downfalls of many traditional martial arts was the lack of a proving ground through open competition and a resultant lack of skepticism that allowed for increasingly outlandish theories and doctrines that veered far from reality and robbed them of effectiveness. I had from an early stage of my training been interested in the value of leg locks as a means of victory in jiu jitsu and MMA. I worked diligently on building a system of attacking the legs which would overcome many of the complaints often voiced against the use of leg locks. During this time I was mostly known to the public through the exploits of MMA fighters such as Georges St-Pierre and Chris Weidman - none of my grappling students chose to compete during those years so my pure grappling style was largely unknown to the public. That all changed when Garry Tonon, Eddie Cummings and Gordon Ryan asked me to coach them for grappling competition. One of

my first actions was to train them extensively in my system of leg attacks, as I believed

this would afford them a considerable advantage over their opponents in competition.

Working initially at local level and building from there, they quickly experienced tremendous success and brought back valuable data for further improvements to our

system. As their success grew they were elevated to higher levels of competition and

their fame grew, along with the notoriety of their leg locks. At this stage an impasse was

reached - now people knew the of the system and its effectiveness; the question became - was it up to the level of the most esteemed leg lock experts in the world? It

was then that I assembled the squad and launched an ambitious plan to overcome public skepticism by systematically fighting and defeating the most renown leg lock experts in MMA/Grappling. The four names on our list were first, Masakazu Imanari, the

feared and revered leg lock master from Japan, called 10th degree leg lock master by

his fans. Second, Reilly Bodycomb, an American practitioner of the Russian art of Sambo, who had garnered a reputation for deep technical knowledge of the leg lock game. Third, Marcin Held, who had used leg locks to win many victories in MMA and emerge as a champion. Fourth, the massively strong and ferocious Rousimar Palhares -

the only man in UFC history to be banned from the sport for being too violent and probably the most feared grappler in modern history. Analysis of the four convinced me

that the squad would prevail against the first three. Events proved me correct as Garry

Tonon and Eddie Cummings quickly and easily defeated all three via leg lock - people

where shocked to see the greatest leg lockers being themselves leg locked by young

students who had only been using this system for less than four years. The greatest trial

was the last. Mr Palhares was in my opinion, easily the best man on our list both technically and physically, moreover he had a mystique and competitiveness that elevated him further still. Deep analysis of his game revealed that he was extremely good at enforcing the simple algorithm of his style on most opponents, but lacked the

ability to change algorithms when the initial one was interfered with. Thus I was confident that Mr Tonon would prevail in a leg lock battle despite the huge size and strength discrepancy. Here you can see Garry Tonon putting Mr Palhares under

extreme pressure with a perfect inverted heel hook - forcing a wild turning escape out of bounds. Most people in the arena that night were utterly shocked to see Mr Palhares repeatedly forced to extricate himself from his own signature move. The crowd gasped as they saw what seemed impossible - the world's most renown leg locker being attacked at every opportunity via leg lock by a young man half his size and strength. When the match came to end by draw both men remarked on the skill and tenacity of the other in a tremendous show of respect. That night in England, many skeptics walked into the arena to watch this match, when it was all over - very few walked out...

From rivalry to friendship:

The very nature of our sport is centered around competition and the ability to gain and enforce competitive advantage over an opponent. One of its greatest pleasures however, comes from the realization that however strong the fervor of competition might be, in the end, the sport as a whole is bigger than any temporary rivalry between ourselves and another person - for we are all ultimately united by the kingly arts of combat. Years ago my student Georges St-Pierre was matched to fight the formidable Jake Shields, who at that time had not lost a fight in almost eight years and who had crushed numerous UFC champions and contenders along the way to his title fight. The fight and the camp leading to it were as tightly contested as any, yet years later, Mr Shields came by to train and work on skills. It was a valuable reminder to me that friendship and camaraderie are more uplifting and lasting than rivalry and advantage. In the end; it is far more important to be a good human being than it is to be a good fighter. Skills in a competitive world and the great achievements they can bring

us make us stand out from the crowd, but it is our humanity and empathy that bring us back. Jake and I share some stories from old campaigns after another tough session with the team

The essence of jiu jitsu:

The ability to control greater size, strength and aggression with lesser size, strength and aggression: One of the defining characteristics of jiu jitsu and indeed, all the combat sports, is the ability to control and overcome greater size, strength and aggression with less. It is the quintessentially human action of using the ingenuity of our conscious minds to make up for the deficiencies of our body. Jiu jitsu is one of the few remaining combat sports that still permits open weight bouts where this essential feature can be tested. The finest example in recent memory was the clash between Garry Tonon and Rousimar Palhares - a man who was the very symbol of size, strength and aggression in our sport and who was in addition, highly skilled in submissions, particularly leg locks. Yet it was the much smaller, weaker and less psychologically aggressive Garry Tonon who dominated most of the action - winning all the submission exchanges in a thrilling encounter of psychological aggression versus tactical aggression that went the distance. It was a superb example of the essential nature of the kingly art of jiu jitsu

Many will look, but few will see:

In all things, but especially in jiu jitsu, small details, often unseen or ignored, make the difference between success and failure. Cultivating a habitual reaching for perfection in performance, however difficult and frustrating that might be, is thus crucial to your advancement. This is so often a game of inches and millimeters and the consequences of even the smallest mechanical or tactical mistakes

can be very costly indeed. I tell you in all honesty that it will be excellence in the performance of the unexciting, mundane aspects of jiu jitsu - not the pursuit of the exotic and showy elements, that will enable you to prevail when you need them most. Here I go over the minutiae of rear strangles with young Nicky Ryan and the ever observant and thus constantly improving, Eddie Cummings.

Position before submission:

jiu jitsu students often use this phrase - some even go so far as to define the sport this way. It is a good way to express a valuable insight to a beginner, but at the higher levels, it is an over simplification. Positional dominance is one form of control and advantage, but it is only one among many forms of advantage. Indeed, such is the subtlety of the sport at international level that it is quite possible to give up to your opponent one form of advantage whilst retaining several different forms for yourself. In this way weakness can be feigned from a position of strength and an unwary opponent taken by surprise by an unforeseen attack. Here Garry Tonon gives away positional advantage to the very talented Jake Shields whilst hunting for other forms of advantage to launch attacks

Submission holds:

The various submission holds are the most distinctive and revered element of jiu jitsu - a fact revealed by the point system of the sport. You can be losing a match by any number of points, but if you are able to lock in a successful submission hold, the match is yours. No other part of the sport is valued so highly. Each of the submissions has its own unique character, which helps explain why so many jiu jitsu players are very good at some, yet surprisingly weak with others. Gaining deep knowledge of the nature and application of each of the main submission holds is a huge

part of your ultimate progress in the sport. Like a large and disparate family, they are all related, yet quite different from each other. Among the main joint locks, the most basic distinction is among the linear locks and the twisting locks. Here I demonstrate a fairly standard variation of ude garami, commonly known as "Kimura" in BJJ parlance. This belongs in the category of twisting locks and is among the most important and effective of the upper body submissions. One of its great hallmarks is its versatility; being equally useful gi or no gi, in both standing and ground grappling, from either top or bottom positions, as both a means of submission and as a means of control, as either an end in itself or as a lead in to other techniques. Jiu jitsu is largely bound up with the skill of creating some form of preliminary advantage before launching an attack. One of the most important forms of advantage is balance breaking, or kuzushi. Kano showed his genius by making this the centerpiece of his Judo program in standing throws- but the concept is just as valuable in ground grappling. At the higher levels of the sport, the ability to break through tough defenses is essential to success- generating kuzushi is one of the best preambles to attacks - without it there is little chance of an attack succeeding and a high risk of a strong counter. Here I test the balance of Eddie Cummings as a prelude to a more serious Attack.

Reflections on the nature of our sport:

We work in a sport where if a single submission hold is applied perfectly - the match is over. Yet if that same submission is applied 99% perfectly but the opponent escapes, it counts for nothing. A failed submission hold, no matter how close, is no more effective than a missed punch in a boxing match (this point does not apply to a well applied submission hold that is effective, but the opponent

opts not to tap and is damaged but continues to fight - in these cases, it had a positive effect insofar as the opponent will be damaged and easier to defeat with subsequent attacks). This creates a demand upon us to have a very deep knowledge of a few match winning moves where we have total confidence in our ability to pull them off against even the strongest resistance, rather than superficial knowledge of many moves. As we saw, superficial knowledge of a move only allows us to INITIATE a move, but only deep knowledge allows us to COMPLETE a move - AND IT IS ONLY COMPLETED MOVES THAT WIN MATCHES. You will succeed or fail based not upon how many moves you can initiate, BUT HOW MANY YOU CAN COMPLETE AGAINST RESISTANCE. The surest way to be able to overcome resistance is to have deeper knowledge around a complex of moves and counters in a specific domain than your opponent does. Your training should reflect this fundamental fact about our sport. Here, Eddie Cummings shows his extraordinarily deep knowledge of the ashi garami position as he locks in a terrifyingly tight heel hook variation during his outstanding run to the finals of EBI 10. Note that these reflections pertain to the specific case of submissions - in other areas of the sport broad knowledge- even superficial knowledge- is necessary for success.

Reflections on my Sensei:

The most important lesson Mr Gracie ever taught me:
Anyone involved in the kingly art of jiu jitsu can understand that their Sensei delves out countless important and valuable lessons, especially in the early stages of development where every day of training seems to offer huge new insights and ways of looking at things. As time passes however, the value of the lessons changes from straightforward technical and tactical advice and starts to move into the strategic and life defining areas. When I was a white belt and training in Mr Gracie's dojo, the senior students were of a

very high level. I developed a reputation as a white belt that was difficult to finish, so many of the seniors enjoyed training with me as a solid test of their finishing skills or a tough warm up before serious training with the other seniors. This kind of training gave me a solid defense, but not much else. I fell into a mindset of thinking that success consisted in holding out for a respectable time. That mindset is acceptable for a beginner, but it cannot sustain development over time. One night I was feeling rather proud of myself having lasted a long round with a senior when Mr Gracie sat next to me and, expressed strong disappointment in my game. He said, " John - the way you play you will never be anything more than an ANNOYANCE to your opponent. You must change and become a THREAT to your opponent. When you do this you will see a total change, not only in your game - but in the game that your opponent brings to you." A moments reflection revealed the truth of his words. From that day forward I changed my whole approach to the game. I began a detailed study of the main submissions of the sport and the necessary preconditions to make them possible. In a short time I started experiencing offensive success for the first time and the game became so much more rewarding and interesting. This seemingly simple lesson became the guiding direction for my jiu jitsu study and my teaching philosophy. Defense will always be the basis of jiu jitsu, but it must be supplemented by a positive attacking spirit to prevent it degenerating into a negative game

classic match up of strength vs mobility for both of our athletes.

Filming the athletes in training and conducting interviews afterwards, the Submission Underground crew had a

busy day at RGA. . It's great to see MMA superstars promoting and competing in these events and using the star power of the MMA game to help grow the grappling game and give our athletes a venue to show our philosophy and methods in the sport.

Thank you to Mr Sonnen and the SUG team from RGA and the squad. The rule set will

feature shortened EBI matches of eight minutes and then into overtime. Our training has

to reflect the higher work rate required by the time constraints - leading to some spectacular matches on the gym floor today! Some of the practice matches could easily

have been used as pay per view material!! ¶ C 0 With over seventy five people in the class it made for an exciting days training...

Ambition and patience:

There are two great mental attributes that I see in most great jiu jitsu students, and indeed, in almost every enterprise that humans engage in (obviously

there are many others, but I want to focus on these two today as they form a relation

that is critical to our long term success or failure). These are AMBITION and PATIENCE. In order to achieve anything of consequence in the world, a person must have ambition, for it is ambition that provides the inner drive that initiates our physical

actions over time. Seen in this light, ambition appears to be a fine thing - there is however, a problem. In our attempts to fulfill our ambition we constantly run into road

blocks. Competition with other people who have similar ambitions, the sheer difficulty of

the tasks we need to complete to realize those ambitions - factors like these lead to frustration as we so often fail in our ambitions. It is exactly then that we must make use

of a second, complimentary mental attribute - patience. Patience is the recognition that

achievement and the skills that bring achievement take time to develop. AMBITION STARTS EVERY ENTERPRISE - BUT ONLY ITS INTERACTION WITH PATIENCE

SUSTAINS EVERY ENTERPRISE AND TAKES IT THROUGH TO COMPLETION. It is critical to understand that one without the other is of little value. Powerful ambition quickly leads to frustration and disappointment when it runs into the reality of competition. We see this all the time with the high attrition rate in jiu jitsu. Too much

patience creates overly contented people with little drive who are happy enough with what they already have and who don't push hard enough to create the changes needed to improve in the time available. We see this all the time in jiu jitsu with people who train for long stretches of time but who make little technical progress. Somewhere in the middle is the solution. Where that point in the middle is, will depend upon your goals, your life situation, what you believe personal happiness to consist of etc. but find it yourself if you are to gain the longevity and drive in a sport that requires both for excellence.

Students and teachers:

Some of my happiest coaching memories come from watching my students teach. I have always been insistent on the idea that my students have a deep understanding of the underlying principles and concepts that underly our approach to the game and that they be capable of explaining them well to others. As a result, my students can in almost every case, do a fine job of teaching our methods and philosophy to students of all levels and backgrounds. In particular Eddie Cummings, Garry Tonon and Gordon Ryan have a complete and deep knowledge of my approach to jiu jitsu. Indeed, I would go further and say that these three have developed an independence and originality of thought that has taken them beyond my teachings and into their own distinctive style. I have taught seminars with all three and am constantly amazed by the maturity and depths of their views and their skill at conveying it to others. All three take immense pride in their knowledge and constantly work to refine and improve it. It is no exaggeration to say they are light years ahead of where I was after a similar time spent in training. This bodes well for the future as they have so much more time to develop their skills and knowledge. All three teach seminars between

competitions. I can attest to how much learning material they offer when they teach.

This weekend in Florida, Mr Ryan will be teaching elements of our style - if you have the

chance to go - don't miss it! Mr Cummings and Mr Tonon are also often available and

can be reached easily through social media to arrange seminars etc so that you can learn more about their method and philosophy. Competition makes our sport thrilling in

the present, but only teaching creates the framework for the health and growth of the

sport into the future.

Beautiful blade:

Here is a new custom Bowie knife made by young prodigy blade artist

Dan Altavilla for me. The Bowie knife comes in so many variations - this one is designed

to be equally adept in both cut and thrust. It has been differentially heat treated in the

Japanese style and thus represents the exciting possibilities that open up when different

cultures merge and enjoin their best elements with each other to produce something

new and great. This sentiment of taking the best from disparate sources is a big theme

in my teaching and is beautifully done here by Mr Altavilla. I love to buy high end production blades, but customs are always my favorite, as they carry an individuality of

expression that separates the artist from the worker. One day I shall write about my strange hobby and why I truly believe that blade craft provides the perfect metaphor for

training in the empty handed martial arts and can provide much insight to the jiu jitsu

student. Mr Altavilla's work is among my favorite knife artists - this handsome specimen

is like a great jiu jitsu player - deadly functionality mixed with beauty and refinement.

Last day of training:

This weekend will see the sixth installment of the growing Sapateiro Invitational grappling event. They use a slightly modified EBI format to put on excellent submission only events. Sapateiro 6 is notable for the incredible amount of talent they have brought in - there are three EBI finalists, an ADCC champion, several ADCC competitors- it is probably fair to say it has a more stacked field than any single EBI event! Gordon Ryan has battled through a mystery illness this camp that has still not been resolved after nearly four months, but has trained without fail with the resolve and discipline of a true stoic. He will take with him his understudy, Matthew Tesla. Mr Tesla has been training at a very high level and gave a very strong performance at the recent ADCC trials. This will be his first big show - the first of many I am sure - for he has a wealth of talent to show off. Building athletes to a peak is always an exciting process - thanks goes to the organizers of Sapeteiro 6 for creating a venue and a thrilling line up for these talented athletes to showcase their individual skills and the appeal of the sport in general. Those who give, shall receive: Very often I see students fight for every inch of ground in a match. The moment contact is made there is a furious fight for grips and every part of the match is tightly contested. Often this is a sound approach - but it is important to understand that it is not the only way to engage your opponent. Too often this approach leads to a result where the two athletes never get to finishing positions because they never get past the battle for initial grips and positions. Very often you will get better results by giving something to your opponent. The key is TO CONTROL HOW MUCH YOU GIVE AND THE AFTERMATH. If you give an opening to a talented opponent without a plan, he will quickly take advantage and score on you. However, if you do so with a sound plan and the skills to enact it, your opponent will often be caught as he

moves into what he perceived as an advantage. So for example, you can let an elbow drift surreptitiously away from your torso to draw your opponent into an underhook, all the while waiting for this occur so that your pre-planned attack off the overhook can come into play. Jiu jitsu is absolutely full of possibilities for this kind of approach. We all have a good idea of what is desirable for both athletes as we spar, so often the act of giving will provide the perfect set up on an over extended opponent as the trap is sprung. This approach requires subterfuge and subtlety along with the skills to recover if your gambit fails and to score if it succeeds - all this is good for your development. Ultimately our sport **REQUIRES FREE MOVEMENT AND EXTENSION OF THE LIMBS IF FINISHES ARE TO OCCUR**. If neither player will engage past initial grips this is unlikely to occur - hence the occasional need to offer **INCENTIVES TO MOVEMENT AND EXTENSION THAT CAN CREATE THE CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR VICTORY**. Here Garry Tonon offers both partial back exposure and a partial ashi garami entanglement as a means of getting into his opponents hips and legs and into a potentially winning position with the least effort and energy expenditure.

Strong start:

The squad entered the professional grappling competition circuit in fine form today. Gordon Ryan won the Sapitiero 6 Grappling Invitational and took \$10,000 first prize. Up and coming kohai student Matthew Tesla put on a great display in his first big competition, submitting everyone on his side of the bracket including 10th stand out Boogyman Martinez to get to the finals against team mate Mr Ryan. Mr Tesla used his superb ashi garami based leg locking skills to finish everyone he faced - Mr Ryan used exclusively upper body attacks to showcase his submission versatility and take the big prize. We have other kohai students competing in Texas - will update as facts come in. I am especially proud of this result as it represents a real breakthrough for Mr Tesla to get into top level pro sub grappling and shine. Mr Ryan has battled

heroically through a mystery illness that has plagued him for months and showed incredible discipline to train through it and prevail. Great to see a strong start to 2017 - big plans, big ambitions and the discipline to make them real.

The kohai shine in Texas:

Fast rising squad kohai (little brothers) Ethan Crelinsten and Oliver Taza took center stage at the Texas Jiu Jitsu Kumite professional grappling tournament yesterday. Both won their respective weight divisions all by submission under EBI rules. Both hail from Canada but train with the squad and have done a fine job of absorbing our methods and philosophy. They have a special place in my heart as they make the same trip from Montreal to train with us in NYC that Georges St-Pierre Made as a young man to become champion - I believe they will do likewise one day in grappling. They spend at least two weeks of every month in NYC and make real sacrifices to get to their goals. Mr Crelinsten has made astonishing progress in technical depth and his repertoire of submissions is already impressive. Mr Taza brings a quiet intensity to both training and competition and has an artistry to his dangerous submission game that is a pleasure to behold. Keep your eye on these youngsters - they have the ambition and the work ethic to go all the way to the top. . . . Good to see them displaying their medals and counting their shekels as reward for their hard work! A fantastic first day for the squad in 2017 with Gordon Ryan winning Sapeteiro 6, Mathew Tesla taking second in a brilliant debut performance, Shy Ace winning his superfight at the same event by submission, Mr Taza and Mr Crelinsten winning In Texas and other kohai putting on great performances at the same event. Renzo and I are so proud of you and all the students at RGA who help you prepare

Shiai Intensity:

Most athletes feel a very different intensity level when they enter competition (shiai) in comparison with daily sparring in the gym. This is perfectly natural

and in some cases it has benefits. As a general rule however, I seek to reduce the overall difference between competition intensity and gym intensity as much as possible.

I like to see athletes compete in a relaxed demeanor rather than an extremely intense

one (there are exceptions obviously) so that the bridge between the gym and the stage

is a narrow one to cross. Developing this relaxed shiai demeanor takes time - but when

it comes, I find the common problem of lowered performance on stage is greatly reduced. There is however, one area of the sport where this general approach does not

apply - the use of finishing holds/submissions. These must be applied with greater intensity in shiai than in the gym due to much greater levels of resistance found in competition than usual circumstances. This does not mean recklessness or unsporting

behavior - it simply means that submissions have to be locked tighter than usual and

with greater focus and power along with a stronger drive to completion than would be

appropriate in a gym setting among friends and teammates. There simply has to be a

stronger threat of potential damage if the opponent is to tap in submission - if that potential is not there,

competitive opponents will simply not surrender. Dealing with these two aspects of intensity, lowering overall shiai intensity closer to gym levels; whilst at the same time

raising submission intensity levels is a big part of contest preparation for our athletes.

Here kohai brown belt Matthew Tesla shows great competition submission intensity as

he finishes one of 10th planets best black belts, Boogyman Martinez via heel hook during an outstanding run to the final of Sapeteiro 6 grappling invitational this weekend.

His reconciliation of overall intensity levels and submission intensity levels was very impressive for a developing student.

Smaller man vs bigger man part 1:

This weekend at Submission underground grappling event run by former UFC superstar Chael Sonnen, Gordon Ryan will take on one of the most decorated ADCC world championship veterans of all time in an EBI style format. Jeff Monson is a two time ADCC gold medalist, two time silver medalist and one time bronze medalist. He has defeated many jiu jitsu icons in ADCC competition with a unique blend of wrestling, counter jiu jitsu and raw physical strength that is extremely difficult to overcome. Mr Ryan is coming off a fine victory this weekend in Florida at Sapeteiro 6 and is already back in the gym preparing for this titanic match up. He will have only eight minutes of regulation time to try to break through against his much larger and stronger rival who has survived the submission arsenals of past jiu jitsu greats for much longer periods and emerged victorious. This will be a fascinating match of a young master of submission offense and a vastly bigger and more experienced master of submission defense under very tight time constraint. Mr Ryan has been battling through a mysterious lower abdominal and hip pain for months now, but has shown real dedication and truly admiral fortitude in training and continuing to grow and develop throughout this adversity. This fascinating match up will provide a truly stern test of his contest preparation.

Smaller man vs bigger man part 2:

This weekend squad Senpai (senior students) Gordon Ryan and Garry Tonon will take on much bigger opponents. Mr Ryan will take on the hulking two time world champion and five time world medalist Jeff Monson. Initially Mr Tonon was to face off against the very powerful Hector Lombard, but Mr Lombard had to pull out due to a scheduling conflict. Then Mr Chael Sonnen showed his usual fearlessness and stepped in on short notice - but had to pull out when Bellator

fight company expressed disapproval of the bout. Mr Sonnen did a fine job of finding a new opponent. UFC standout Antonio Carlos Jr. will face Mr Tonon. Mr Carlos Jr has a very impressive background in jiu jitsu - he was a double world champion at brown belt and since then has recorded multiple victories over jiu jitsu icons such as Leandro Lo, Romulo Barral, and Bernardo Faria. He represented great teams in both jiu jitsu and MMA- Checkmat and ATT. Clearly his skills are of the highest level to defeat such great opponents. He is a real physical specimen - well over two hundred very athletic pounds and tall. This should afford him a big physical advantage in both regulation time and overtime. As always, the squad will have to rely on skill and tactics to prevail. Unfortunately the matches are very short - just eight minutes - so there is no way to use time as a weapon to tire the bigger opponents in this tournament. However, both Mr Tonon and Mr Ryan have trained extremely well in preparation despite some physical problems and they are eager to put on a show against these very talented strongmen they face in this new competition venue. Submission underground is doing a fine job of working the interface between grappling and MMA and brings the showmanship of Mr Chael Sonnen along with the rule system of Mr Eddie Bravo to create an exciting venue for athletes from both sports to showcase their skills. It appears that Jeff Monson has pulled out of the submission underground event and will no longer be facing Gordon Ryan in what would have been a fascinating battle of experience, size, strength and submission defense vs agility and submission offense. The organizers of Submission Underground have substituted leg locking specialist Joe Baize as substitute. Mr Baize competed at EBI 8 which Mr Ryan won - but they never met as they were on opposite sides of the brackets. I remember Mr Baize putting on a very good performance. He was probably the smallest man in the tournament yet won his first match well by submission (leg lock) and did very well against the much larger and stronger Felipe Fogolin, almost catching his legs on multiple occasions before

getting tired and caught in a stranglehold. Nonetheless I was impressed by his skills, calmness under pressure and willingness to mix it up with bigger athletes. The nature of the match now is very different - it will be a match centered around submission skills - where leg submissions are the specialty of both athletes. Both men know what it takes to get to the legs and finish on the legs. It's been a frustrating week for the squad running through multiple opponents pulling out of match ups at the last minute - we are proud of our record of professionalism of showing up come what may. Now it seems we have two dangerous opponents who play the submission game very well and are ready to play ball Sunday night in Portland.

There's no business like show business:

Tomorrow night in Portland Oregon, MMA's greatest showman, Chael Sonnen will run the show at Submission Underground - but the squad will look to be the ones putting on the show. Garry Tonon takes on Brazilian jiu jitsu and MMA standout, Antonio Carlos Jr - a powerful athlete far bigger and stronger than himself who has beaten some of the biggest names in IBJJF competition and who brings a very exciting set of submission skills. Gordon Ryan takes on Kentucky Leg lock specialist Joe Baize, who had a sterling performance at EBI 8. Rules will be standard EBI, but with a shortened time limit of only eight minutes. It will be interesting to see how this affects the work rate and pacing of the matches. Mr Sonnen is doing a fine job of integrating the area between MMA and grappling in his shows and has a natural sense of how to get people's attention in ways that will grow the sport. Our team is interested to see how the use of a cage will affect the matches. This is the first time the squad has had to grapple in a cage. Both our opponents have

extensive MMA experience and thus expertise in cage work - that will definitely makes things interesting. A core element of our style is that great jiu jitsu must have an aesthetic element to it in addition to its effectiveness. Our team loves to put on a show. Of course the result will always be paramount, but we train to create a dynamic game that always pushes towards submission - this makes the squad natural showmen. In amateur sports the only thing of value is the result - this gives it an admirable purity. The idea of a professional sport - a sport that people see as ENTERTAINMENT, a medium of entertainment that people pay to watch, requires that the athlete do more than win - he must win a fashion that MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO WATCH. This is a difficult requirement, but one which every professional athlete must work on. Each must find their own way. Ours will always be based around dynamic movement leading to control and the ruthless pursuit of submission above all.

To the winner go the spoils:

Kohai student Jonathan "JC" Caletine put on his best competition display yet today, winning the 145 pound division of The Finishers Tournament 3 - a popular local event. It included outstanding local grapplers such as JM Holland, Mike Davila and John Battle, but JC was able to get past them all to win the first place honors. JC has always looked good in the gym - Eddie Cummings often insists that I match him with JC as often as possible when he is preparing for big events as he believes JC is the most difficult among the Kohai to finish. Today he was able to let his gym skills shine on the stage and gain victory - with many more to follow I am sure. Great work JC and great work by the shows organizers for drawing such strong local talent into an event that provides ideal training for those looking to gain the kind of experience they will need to rise to the top.

Walking the walk:

Our team often talks about taking on bigger, stronger opponents to prove the efficacy of our methods. No one does this better than Garry Tonon. His opponent, IBJJF world champion and UFC standout, Antonio Carlos Jr, a man who has defeated Bernardo Faria, Leandro Lo and Romulo Barral on multiple occasions, including by submission, weighed in for tonight's event in Portland at 230 pounds. Garry Tonon weighed in heavier than usual - 170 pounds. This will be the biggest weight difference he has had to contend with since he fought Buchecha in ADCC when

he had just been awarded his black belt. Adding to the difficulty is a big height advantage to Mr Carlos Jr. People can say whatever they want about Mr Tonon, but they can never criticize his willingness to back up his words with action and showcase

the art against bigger opponents. In this last week he was matched against three men

for tonight's event - Hector Lombard, Chael Sonnen and Mr Carlos Jr - each one far bigger and stronger than him and each one bigger than the one before him. The

first two had to pull out, leaving the biggest and best qualified. No one his own size would accept the match, but Mr Tonon as always accepted whoever he was offered. He

and Gordon Ryan have trained very well - now it's on to the stage - this time a cage -
and under the lights

major knee operations is a difficult task indeed

- made more so by the speed at which the sport itself changes and evolves. However, if there is one person to do it, it is Mr St-Pierre. He will take on the challenge with his usual drive and perfectionism. It is not

yet settled who his first opponent shall be, nor the time it shall be fought, but as soon as

Mr St-Pierre is ready, training and preparation will begin in earnest. It will be interesting

watching the younger squad members work in grappling with Mr St-Pierre, and then Mr

St-Pierre with them in MMA. I am sure there will be some memorable training sessions!

Three the hard way:

If you are to accomplish anything great in life, be prepared to work hard over time with a sound plan. Outstanding kohai students Oliver Taza and Stanley

Rosa both have ambitions. Mr Taza will compete soon in the upcoming welterweight EBI alongside Gordon Ryan. Every Monday he trains three classes with me (in addition

to the rest of the week). The first two at RGA in midtown Manhattan and the last at night

all the way up in the Bronx at my student and friend, Doug Pelinkovic's Dojo. Up at 6am

for the first class and getting home at 11pm to get ready for the next day's training. Many people have ambition, but only a few have the discipline, patience and work ethic

to make those ambitions reality. It helps a lot to have equally ambitious and hard working partners. Here Mr Taza works with one of his best training partners, Stanley Rosa, as I push them through front headlock drills and then into sparring. I always like

to see dojo friendships build between like minded athletes - the road to the top is a long

one - but easier when walked in good company.

"You think he's gonna get that ashi garami?"

"Nope - not even close."

Another day of skill development

, joined by one of the most skillful of them all - creating some memorable coaching moments. My favorite? Mr St-Pierre watching Garry Tonon

miss an inverted heel hook from cross ashi garami and telling him, "I am not impressed

by your performance. "

Loneliness in a crowded room:

Gordon Ryan and Oliver Taza take some time out to reflect on what they must get done in an early morning training session for EBI 11 - The first EBI of 2017, the first EBI for Mr Taza, the first welterweight EBI for Mr Ryan and the first time two squad members have allowed to compete in the same EBI event since EBI 6. The juxtaposition between jiu jitsu as a sport trained as a team, but fought as individuals, is a strong one. These two battle every day, as do all members of the squad - keeping a spirit of camaraderie and mutual benefit is the key to preventing it becoming a free for all with team cohesion falling to a degree where the entire training program degenerates. Each athlete has different skills and attributes - I coach a very recognizable general approach to the game, but I also recognize the importance of self expression and individuality if an athlete is to maximize his potential. In a room where everyone follows and believes the same general philosophy, it is crucial to keep that sense of how you are going to do things your way and find a balance between shared beliefs and individuality. Hence I like to see my athletes in those lonely moments of self reflection before and after training. Those quiet moments have a way of leading to the buzz and roar of the crowd at showtime

Drilling for perfection:

An interesting feature of our sport is that when moves are performed well, there is a feeling of "fitting in correctly" that is unmistakable. Even relatively inexperienced students can feel a well performed move locking into place. So too, imperfections are obvious to perceive as your partner can wriggle free easily by exploiting whatever mechanical imperfections you have made. When drilling, STUDENTS MUST BE MINDFUL OF ACTIVELY SEEKING TO FIND THAT PERFECT "FIT IN" WHERE THE GEOMETRY OF THEIR BODY FITS EFFECTIVELY INTO THE GEOMETRY OF THEIR WORKOUT PARTNERS BODY IN A WAY THAT CREATES THE TIGHTNESS OF FIT THAT ENSURES SUCCESS. That is why I don't have my

students drill for numbers of repetitions or for time. When numbers or time are the goal they will focus on that rather than on mechanical form. When I see mechanical form is at a satisfactory level - I move them on to something else - I am not guided by time or numbers. Here Georges St-Pierre works on his front triangle (omote sankaku) on a standing opponent - a situation that requires particularly close attention to correct mechanical form if it is to succeed

One selfie - four UFC fighters:

UFC standout Rafael "Sapo" Natal takes the selfie of the year at the afternoon class as the squad prepares for upcoming events. Mr Natal is joined by UFC brothers past and present, Jake Shields, who has just moved to NYC to train full time with the squad, David Branch, two division WSOF champion who has just signed with the UFC and begins his run to to the top at 185 pounds , and squad OG, Georges St-Pierre, on the comeback trail. Great afternoon of training in the blue basement - so much ambition, so much potential. These are men who know that ambition, passion, drive, discipline guided by a sensible plan, can create greatness in the gym and build the confidence to take it from the gym to the world stage and do something truly great. Where else can you find a random scene like this on an average Thursday afternoon? #onlyatrenzos , 0

Building to a peak:

A critical part of contest success is the notion of progression to a peak performance on given date of competition. This of course, is the basis behind the idea of a camp in preparation for a bout. Often a very valuable part of this notion of peaking is the use of preparatory bouts before the main event to help prepare you for what you consider may be problematic elements in the main upcoming event.

Outstanding kohai student Oliver Taza is making his EBI debut on March 5th. As one of the smaller welterweights he wanted to prepare himself for the physical intensity of top level grappling - a part of the game that often surprises debutants. Accordingly he entered a superfight this weekend against bigger and stronger UFC Middle weight Caio Magalhaes (if Mr Taza did MMA it would be at lightweight). Mr Magalhaes is a blackbelt in jiu jitsu from the great Nova Uniao team and grappling was his MMA foundation. In a very tough physical match, fought inside a cage, Mr Taza worked his way to an excellent submission win via heel hook variation after twelve minutes of hard fought action. An excellent result in itself - but all the more so as preparation for the main event and the physicality to be expected there.

Teammates and Countrymen:

It was a fine weekend for the Canadian section of the squad! Kohai teammates Oliver Taza and Ethan Crelinsten have been doing what all kohai (junior students) must seek to do - build up their skills to a point where they become Senpai (seniors). Mr Crelinsten has been training and competing brilliantly at local level as part of his climb to the top. He is developing well along the lines we exhibit - to demonstrate control leading to submission across the entire body, with equal facility from top or bottom position. Today he was able to win every match in regulation time by submission at the Radius Invitational in Connecticut. Normally Mr Crelinsten competes at 135 pounds - but today he entered at 155 to test his mettle against bigger and stronger opponents. He took on and defeated local standouts Ian Murray, Zach Masslany and Jon Battle to win the eight man tournament and take home one thousand shekels! He did it by working utilizing advanced elements of our back attack system that he has been working very hard upon and developing impressive prowess. It is always great to see the marriage of ambition and work ethic and tinder it rewarded with

success. Well done to our Canadian athletes who travel so far to work on the skills that take them ever closer to their goals.

Recently I was asked to appear in a scene in the TV show "Billions."

The scene

required us to show a beginner in jiu jitsu in a first introductory lesson. The writers asked me if there was a move that represented well the general nature of the sport to a

wide audience, most of whom know nothing about it. My answer was a confident "yes" -

Juji jime- the cross collar strangle performed from the mounted position. My reasoning

was this - the classical approach to jiu jitsu involves taking an opponent to the floor where he is more easily controlled, then working past his legs, through a hierarchy of

pins culminating in the mount or rear mount. From there, applying a submission hold to

end the fight. I chose Juji jime because beginning jiu jitsu should always be in a gi, both

for practical and cultural /historical reasons, and of course Juji jime requires a jacket.

Moreover, strangleholds represent the notion of a bloodless and relatively painless victory - one of the key features of jiu jitsu. Even a naive viewer would be able to recognize the value of the mounted position, the effectiveness of a stranglehold and the

virtue of victory without the need for bludgeoning a foe to bloody defeat. On a deeper

level - to those who DO study the art, I chose Juji jime because it represents something

very different - the notion of PROGRESSIVE BASICS. Juji jime was taught to us all in our very first beginner classes - yet we will all be using it until our last days in the sport -

refining it, perfecting it, learning all of its subtleties and nuances. THE BEST TECHNIQUES IN OUR SPORT TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO LEARN, BUT A

LIFETIME TO PERFECT. This notion of path from beginner to expert is perfectly represented by Juji jime from mount - the tokui waza (favorite technique) of the great

Roger Gracie. In his hands it was anything but a beginners move - it was an

unstoppable engine of destruction that he used repeatedly at world championship level and taught the jiu jitsu world the value of building upon the beginners foundation in the sport and over time, making it the most advanced move of them all.

Tough day at the office: With EBI 11 coming up this Sunday, training has been going at a high gear these last few weeks. Today Gordon Ryan and Oliver Taza locked horns with the outstanding Jake Shields and Mathew Tesla among others to test in live sparring the techniques and strategies the squad develops for the big shows. The competitors list for EBI 11 welterweight event is very impressive indeed - getting ready for the intensity of top level grappling whilst maintaining athlete safety in the final days is always a delicate balancing act. Professionalism and prioritizing the show over the gym is the key to getting it right.

The Return:

UFC President Mr Dana White publicly announced today what has been negotiated back and forth over the last few months between his company and Georges St-Pierre - a return to the octagon that would involve something new and extraordinarily challenging. That new challenge will be a rise in weight class against the new middleweight champion, Micheal Bisping. Mr Bisping won a sensational match via knockout over Luke Rockhold to add to a hard fought win over the greatest middleweight of all time, Anderson Silva and a subsequent win over middleweight legend Dan Henderson. Mr Bisping started his career as a light heavyweight, but dropped down to become a huge middle weight. In contrast, Mr St-Pierre is by contemporary standards an average size welterweight with a walk around weight of 192

pounds his entire career. Interestingly his win over Dan Henderson made Mr Bisping the athlete with the most wins in UFC history - overtaking Mr St-Pierre in this distinction (though Mr St-Pierre has far fewer losses). Going up weight divisions is always a tricky affair as the danger of injury in training with bigger partners goes up and the penalty for making mistakes in a match is higher, but Mr St-Pierre is determined to push forward into the challenge and take this new phase of his career in this interesting new direction. He has been doing well in his grappling training and is still in great shape despite three years away from professional fighting- two great champions, both beginning their careers at roughly the same time, both outspoken proponents of better testing for PED's in MMA, both holding at some time the record for wins in the octagon, one much bigger than the other - this should be interesting! .

Fireworks:

There is no bigger show than the UFC and this weekends UFC looks like it will be a great event. Two of my favorite divisions, welterweight and lightweight will get some much needed clarity and closure after recent disorder. The majority draw in the first match between Tyron Woodley and Steven Thompson prevented Demian Maia from getting his much deserved title shot, but hopefully now we shall get a positive result and the welterweight division can move forward. Georges St-Pierre always told me Mr Thompson was the best standing striker he ever saw or worked with, but Mr Woodley did extremely well with him in the standing position in the first fight. Both men can hit well from extreme distances, covering vast amounts of ground to land blows - one with crushing one punch KO power, the other with stunning accuracy and timing. The bout I am most interested in is at light weight. I have always been extremely

impressed by Khabib Nurmagomedov. His takedown and ground control skills are of the highest level. Several people I know in the industry whose word I trust have told me numerous stories of Mr Nurmagomedov dominating very highly ranked athletes in weight divisions above his own. He has a smothering control that makes his opponents look powerless in comparison. On the other hand, his opponent, Tony Ferguson has a fascinating style based around scrambles and devastating attacks as he directs those scrambles in ways that few opponents can keep up with. One fighter is a master of control - the other is a master of chaos- this is going to be very interesting indeed!

Rising to the top:

As a coach I always love to watch the most essential dynamic of a healthy training room - the work done by junior students (kohai) to rise to senior status (Senpai). Watching the growth of the juniors is always uplifting to me as a coach and is the best feedback I get as to the relative health of the training program I run. A notable addition to the ranks of the kohai is a young student of my great friend and teammate Matt Serra, Jason Rau. He came to us with a strong positional game and has taken to our methods very well indeed. Keep your eye on the progress of this talented young man. Next week he will compete in a tournament that has helped launch so many of our kohai to the next level - Sapeteiro 7. It will feature a sixteen man tournament featuring many outstanding grapplers, some of whom are in this weekends EBI event. It will be at a weight of 175 pounds and the athletes will duke it out for two thousand shekels in what should be a thrilling experience for the competitors and the fans. I'm looking forward to a display of skills from Mr Rau blending old school positional skill with squad style submission work . , working out with him are fellow kohai Matthew Tesla and Frankie Rosenthal along with MMA legend Jake Shields. Here they work in their Juji gatame armlock drills before getting into sparring

My original competing Grappling student, Eddie Cummings, will be teaching a seminar

at Musclepharm headquarters in Denver Colorado.

Mr Cummings has spent the most

time of all my competing students in private classes with me. He has an unparalleled

knowledge of my leg lock system. Unfortunately his incredible success with leg locks in

top level level competition has blinded most people to his skills in upper body submissions. In this sense he is something of a victim of his own success! He also has

a very strong positional game with excellent guard retention and passing skills. Mr Cummings, like all my best students, is an extremely inventive fellow who has gone beyond my teachings and has many very effective variations of his favorite skills and

positions that are uniquely his own. On top of all this, his background in academia makes him a truly fine teacher - he can really take his knowledge and make it accessible to you. If you can make it to Denver Colorado, take the time to learn from

this man - you will get a deep insight into the squads philosophy, tactics and methods.

New York City style in Denver - you will love it!

Gordon Ryan wins EBI 11:

Gordon Ryan won every match by submission tonight in LA

to take his third EBI title - his first at his actual body weight of 170 pounds. He focused

almost entirely on strangleholds, utilizing some of the more basic elements our back attack system and front headlock system to win the maximum possible prize money of

twenty thousand dollars. It was his best training camp in a long time - no longer plagued

by a lower abdominal problem that had made the previous few camps very tough, he

took out a very tough Vagner Rocha with a superbly applied stranglehold in the finals.

Team mate Oliver Taza braves a severe knee injury suffered in his last week of training and lost a close match in overtime via riding time, but impressed me with his heart and composure under very tough circumstances- he will rest and then come back to show off his skills in the future. Thanks again to the staff of EBI who always do such a fine job of putting on an exciting production. Mr Eddie Bravo, Viktor Davila and his crew did it again - filling a new venue and creating a really exciting event and atmosphere. There was a very exciting debut for the combat jiu jitsu tonight - i will discuss that soon. Thank you all for your support from the squad! Hope you enjoyed the show! , ,

LA to NYC:

There is always a surreal feeling about going from LA to coach an EBI show Sunday night, then red eye home to New York City to teach at Renzo Gracie Academy Monday morning and then on to The Bronx to teach at night. It's a marathon, but an instructive one. It shows very clearly the two faces of our sport. The core of it will always be the private face of the sport - the unheralded grind in the basement where the skills and attributes necessary for success are forged. The public face is that of competition (shiai), where those hard won skills and attributes can be rewarded with accolades and recognition attained. The glamor is in that public face, but the heart and soul of the sport is in the private face - that's why even though it's tiring, I love that red eye flight home to see the crew and get ready for the next challenge. Back to the hustle and bustle of freezing cold NYC, subway uptown, then on to the Bronx to work on those skills and attributes.

Two teams - a word of thanks:

Squad Senpai Gordon Ryan put on a superb show Sunday night, showcasing his strangulation skills. It was a fine reflection of his individual progress and his team work with other squad members in preparation for the event. Such stand out performances are great for the sport. They inspire young developing athletes and give them a strong technical role model to follow. It is easy to focus all the attention on the athlete and his support team. There was however, a second team at the event on Sunday night, a team that does not get the spotlight, but whose work is every bit as important as the stars onstage - the EBI production team. These dedicated men and women operate in the background and always do their best to create a smooth running and efficient operation. Believe me, it's not easy. There are so many intangibles at a live sports event that it always seems miraculous to me that they get it done as well as they do. Were it not for the great work done by these people in building the infrastructure for the show and running it under the pressure of live performance - NONE OF OUR HARD WORK, TRAINING INNOVATIONS, PHILOSOPHY AND SKILLS WOULD EVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AND WOULD REMAIN UNKNOWN IN A BASEMENT IN NYC. On behalf of the squad, to the entire ebi production staff, from team leaders Eddie Bravo and Victor Davila, all the way through the many hard working individuals carrying out crucial but thankless tasks that make it all happen - thank you . . . Thanks for a well run, innovative show that has let Grappling athletes have an exciting and well run event that can allow them to showcase the art we all love and put so much time into.

Squad style seminar in LA - Featuring Gordon Ryan:

Fresh off his third EBI title this weekend, Gordon Ryan will be teaching a seminar this Saturday at my good friend and team mate, Shawn Williams dojo this Saturday March 11. I am very excited about this -

it's a great opportunity for our Californian fans to see up close some NYC style jiu jitsu.

Of all my students, Mr Ryan has the deepest knowledge of my back attack system.

A

common misunderstanding of our system is that it is merely a refinement of already existing systems. Mr Ryan will have no problems dispelling that misunderstanding with

his deep knowledge of this critical aspect of our game. Mr Ryan, like all my senior students is very innovative and independent. He has developed many additional additional elements, not only of back attacks, but throughout his game, that go beyond

my teachings and are his own invention - many of them are incredibly effective. One of

my proudest days as a coach occurred when Gordon Ryan and Garry Tonon taught some moves at a charity seminar in front of myself and My sensei, Renzo Gracie. Mr Gracie turned to me and said admiringly , "these guys teach like college professors." Mr

Ryan excels (like all my students) in leg attacks, kimura, front headlock, triangle(sankaku) and armbar (Juji gatame). Whatever he chooses to teach, I promise

you, you will learn and profit from. Hoping our Californian fans enjoy the seminar as much as the ebi show! You won't find a better teacher or a better host school in which to learn.

The value of rematches:

One of the best indicators of the effectiveness of a given training program comes from rematches. They provide invaluable information because

comparisons in performance can be made relative to an opponent - the comparisons

are not always perfect, as other factors might influence the respective outcomes, but

they are far better than most methods of assessing progress. For these reasons I always pay particular attention to rematches. I was always very proud of the fact that

Georges St-Pierre never lost a rematch in his career - that was a good indicator of a training program that constantly took him forward in performance levels. A fascinating

rematch occurred at EBI 11 when Gordon Ryan took on the very tough and capable

Vagner Rocha. The two had fought to a long draw around six months ago. Mr Ryan had done most of the attacking but was unable to finish his many attacks. In response we worked a lot on using leg attacks to create reversals into top position. Mr Ryan is extremely adept at creating top pressure combined with finely measured leg pummeling to free his legs and work to superior positions- the one he favors most is the back. This time he was not to be denied. Using some of the more basic elements of our back attack system he broke through and got the stranglehold that eluded him previously. This was a good sign of his continuing progress and that constant additions and refinements of tactics and techniques can make what seemed impossible yesterday, relatively simple today. @allinphoto @banevis

Washington at Valley Forge,

the Soviet army in the Battle of Moscow or any other of the myriad examples of humans prevailing in conditions so harsh that one can only feel shame for complaining about our minor problems, this historical perspective keeps us honest in an age where so many look for the weakest excuse to avoid work or training. History teaches us very clearly that we can endure far more we usually tolerate. Snow in NYC? Three champions had no difficulty in getting to the gym to hone their skills. Georges St-Pierre, Jake Shields and Matthew Tesla relax after a session working back attack sequences. Snow day for most? Not for champions...

Mr Tonon goes forth:

Squad standout Garry Tonon will be teaching a big no gi seminar in Oklahoma on 03/25/17 at Oklahoma Martial Martial Arts Academy. Mr Tonon comes across as playful, but when it's time to teach, he is dead serious about getting

performance increases. He has a superb knowledge of technique and tactics and the ability to pass that on to others while creating a warm and fun atmosphere as he does it. Of all my students, Mr Tonon is foremost in exploiting and controlling the interface between standing grappling (tachi-waza) and ground Grappling (ne waza) - a critical part of our coaching program. In addition, He is the best at creating scrambles and controlling their direction towards our favorite finishes. Often people talk to me about Mr Tonon and describe him as a intuitive grappler who just has an innate ability to get to winning positions - they are invariably shocked when they see him teach and see that there is a highly practiced method to what he does and that others can be taught to do it as well. If you are in Oklahoma and have a chance to get to the seminar - do it! You will learn the precise methodology of one of best grapplers on the planet. Mr Tonon is an extremely innovative student who constantly adjusts and improves upon the material I show him to arrive at a fascinating game that is very much his own. As with all my senior students, I often feel I learn as much from him as he does from me. If you want to see some of the most innovative and cutting edge grappling technique - get to Mr Tonon's seminar. .

Keeping it fun:

often people seem to assume that a gym putting out champions is probably a stern and strict environment where people follow very formal behavioral rules. In fact I prefer an environment where the training is heavy, but the atmosphere is light. I find the room has better training longevity when people ENJOY the atmosphere rather than ENDURE it. As such, visitors are often surprised when they hear us calling out off color jokes and insults to each other as training begins. When training is over, it's

story and stand up routine time. Humor is the means by which students bond and get through tough tests and the inevitable disappointments of a highly competitive and difficult game where many play, but only one can win. Here, Georges St-Pierre takes some serious abuse from myself and Garry Tonon, I'm going to guess it has something to do with his choice of workout apparel. In which case it is well deserved. Finding that balance between work and play is important for the health of any training program.

Making a statement:

It's one thing to win a tournament- it's quite another to predetermine HOW you will win the tournament. Two days before EBI 11, Gordon Ryan told me he would not use any joint lock submissions, but instead, limit himself to strangleholds with the arms (no sankaku/triangles using the legs) as the means of victory. Oftentimes people complain that our squad only wins via leg lock because we have an advantage in that department and that we are thus a team of "one trick ponies." In fact, anyone familiar with my teachings will know I actually have a preference for strangleholds over all forms of joint lock, including leg locks. A huge part of our training is spent in refining our back and front headlock systems to get into strangleholds, yet most commentators only speak of our leg locks. I was initially worried about this limitation- in general I prefer to use HANDICAPPING - the practice of limiting your submissions to a few chosen ones and not allowing yourself any others as a method of TRAINING rather than something to do in competition. Mr Ryan, however, had trained very diligently and his strangles were very sharp indeed so I felt confident he could get his plan to work. Handicapping is one of our most commonly used training methodologies, it was odd, but extremely impressive to watch it being used in high level competition. Here, Gary Tonon and I call out the sequences of our back attack system to Mr Ryan in the finals as he closes in on the stranglehold- but there is no need - he

knows them so well it is like clockwork as opponents are progressively tied up and rendered defensively ineffective.

Reflections on my Sensei - The little things reveal the big things:

Often I am asked to tell

stories about the many adventures of my sensei, Renzo Gracie. He has an action packed life that could easily make a top rated reality show. Yet when people ask me to

tell a story that illustrates his character, I tell a story that has very little drama and action, yet says much about his character and his philosophy. Back in the mid 1990's,

Mr Gracie and I had finished a late training session prior to an upcoming professional

fight in Japan. We were in his car looking for a place to eat. A few days prior I had read

in the newspapers about a spate of murders of NYC taxi drivers. In response, the taxi

union had installed a special orange light on the back of NYC cabs which they could discreetly turn on if they felt threatened in order to alert policemen driving past them. As

Renzo drove, I saw a cab in front of us with the panic light activated. I told Renzo what I

had read - before I could even finish, he gunned the engine and in a flash raced ahead

of the cab and turned in front of it to stop it at the curb like some crazy cop show episode. Before I could even get out of the car, Mr Gracie was at the drivers window. I

got to the rear door on the other side and opened it. Inside was a terrified driver and in

the back seat, an extremely good looking and glamorous woman in a very short skirt -

they thought we were thugs rather than rescuing heroes! Very quickly it became apparent there was no danger either to anyone or from anyone and the driver had simply accidentally turned on the device. The four of us laughed and bade each other

well and we got back in the car and drove off. Years later I reminded Renzo of the incident - he did not even remember it - there was so little action it did not even register

in his memory among all the drama he has been a part of. Yet to me it illustrates much.

Mr Gracie always told me, MARTIAL ARTS WERE NOT CREATED TO MAKE THE

STRONG STRONGER, BUT TO GIVE THE WEAK A HELPING HAND IN A PREDATORY AND UNKIND WORLD. Many people speak this message, but I was always very proud to know my sensei LIVED it.

Defending what's yours:

Garry Tonon defeated the very tough Dustin Akbari to win the Fight To Win welterweight belt. Now he must defend it against three time world championship ADCC veteran Justin Rader. Mr Rader has built a fine grappling career around excellent wrestling, superb Submission defense, a very nasty guillotine and great tactical sense. Mr Tonon will have to travel to Mr Rader's home territory in Oklahoma City to defend his title. Friday night the two American standouts will clash in a ten minute submission only match. Should it go the distance, a decision based on control and submission attempts will be made. Mr Tonon has trained with his usual enthusiasm and completeness. Recent improvements in his positional game, particularly in the subtleties of limb positioning, are something I look forward to seeing in his upcoming matches. Looking forward to overseeing these last few days of training and then the big show Friday night. Fight to Win continues to impress with great shows and excellent match ups - this match between two great American welterweights in the American heartland should be a real show! Fight to Win 28

Entering into the unknown:

Those moments when an athlete faces an opponent for the first time are always an entrance into the unknown. There is a danger in this. We all fear the unknown and our imagination can work upon us in ways that make it all terrifying. It is natural to wonder if the opponent has skills, techniques, knowledge, strength or tactics that we don't. That fear can have disastrous effects on performance. As fear increases, we become increasingly conservative in our choice of technique to use. We limit ourselves to only our most trusted techniques and hesitate when opportunity arises. Learning to deal with and overcome this fear of the unknown is what separates

the great performers in the gym from the great performers on the stage. Interestingly the presence or lack of presence of fear is not an indicator of whether the athlete will perform on the stage. I have seen athletes who felt no fear perform poorly and others who are terrified every time they fight perform brilliantly. Each must find their own way around those moments of entering the unknown. I have my own opinions about this problem and often use them with my athletes. It is far too long for an Instagram post - but one day I hope to write or speak about it, for in all honesty, it is the last critical obstacle that the athlete must learn to master if he or she is to maximize their performance in competition

New challenges:

Those of you who know me better know that my body has some rather severe problems that began long before jiu jitsu. When I was in my early teens I had a series of severe Knee tears that were diagnosed as MCL tears, but which more advanced doctors here in the US have told me we're almost certainly ACL tears (no MRI's in those days) This culminated in a final tear at age 17 that left me with a very unstable knee. An operation to go in and tighten the MCL was proposed - it was a disaster - leaving me with a shortened leg that would not straighten along with with severe misalignment. From that day forth I walked with a limp and all left knee movement was painful and dysfunctional As time wore on the knee developed chronic arthritis and arthrofibrosis. Because of the misalignment of my body I soon developed severe back pain and eventually severe hip arthritis on the same side. In my mid forties the hip became so bad I had to get a hip replacement at age 48. This went well and I entered jiu jitsu again with a new focus - I would now focus entirely on my students, since my own days of hard sparring were over. Then three months ago my knee appeared to collapse during a simple demonstration of a guard position, with several more cases since then, some from such innocuous actions as taking off a shoe. Yesterday my knee collapsed again and I finally went to get x Rays and MRI and examination.

The prognosis is rather grim. I apparently need a full knee replacement. This would effectively end much of what I do on the mats. Knee replacements are generally much less robust than hip replacements and curtail movement much more.

My dear students have kindly put up with my inability to demonstrate moves these last three months and the senpai (senior students) always help brilliantly when I can't perform the demonstration, but I was always very proud throughout my coaching career to personally demonstrate and show the philosophy of my style on the mats - it appears those days may be over.

The best NYC surgeons are telling me to get the replacement- I am holding out hope for some kind recovery. This has come at a very bad time. Georges St-Pierre is planning a comeback and the squad is on the verge of breaking through to a new level of development. I am sorry to all those who wanted to do private classes or book me for seminars - my body just wasn't capable and I did not want to disappoint anyone.

All my jiu jitsu career I have made my living through private classes and seminars - teaching on average 6 private classes a day on top of group classes. I may have to change that now as my body won't allow me currently to even walk properly or demonstrate a move. All jiu jitsu is about adaptation of our body to the principles of the sport. All my adult life I have adapted to the limitations of my crippled left leg. When my hip gave way I adapted my lifestyle to those changes. Now I must adapt around these new problems with my old nemesis left knee. I am hoping I can recover enough in time without surgery that I can continue to do as I always have, but if not, I will find new ways to improve the performance of my students even if my body is not involved. There are cases of outstanding coaches who were not able to physically participate in workouts but who nonetheless played a valuable role in athletes development. A big thank you to all my students who have been helping through this rather frustrating time and an apology to those I could not teach. I shall endeavor first to get through this without surgery and recover - but if I find surgery is unavoidable I will get it done and find a way to adapt and improve myself as a coach - I have done it before and will do it again.

Wishing you all well -
John Danaher

A word of thanks to you all:

I just wanted to say thank you so much for the kindness of so many people who reached out after I told you all about my current situation. There are simply too many to thank individually, but it was incredibly heartwarming to see your response after a rather difficult day. I am giving myself a time frame of around six months to try alternative therapies to full knee replacement. I have my own reasons to be cautiously optimistic about an improvement in the condition of my knee within that timeframe. If there is no sign of improvement I will go ahead and replace the knee and go from there. Once again thank you all so much for your very generous support. I went back to the gym today to teach with a knee full of cortisone to help. It was good for me to see my students and work to convey our methods and approaches, even if I can't do it physically myself. Thank you all so much - John Danaher

Back in the saddle:

Propped up by some cortisone I came back to limited teaching duties today. It was great to see youngest squad member Mikey Wilson back on the mats. He and Nicky Ryan worked on elements of our back attack system, an area that Mr Ryan excels in. Joining us was the formidable Jake Shields, who continues to impress us with his development here with the squad. I got a chance to teach our approach and philosophy of back control and attack, and also display my superior taste in walking canes ☺ There is more to my style than just rash guards! It felt

great to teach even if recent problems with my body made the physical side of teaching

impossible today - there is so much about our game that is mental/philosophical that I

felt that some valuable input could be made regardless. There was much excited talk

after training about Garry Tonon's match tonight at Fight to Win in Oklahoma tonight. Mr

Tonon has trained extremely well and is excited to put our approach to the game to another test against the very talented and tough Justin Rader. Keep your eyes on that

show - it should be a fine one indeed!

It all begins in the training room:

The squad was thrilled to watch team mate Garry

Tonon put on another match-of-the-year-candidate performance last night in Oklahoma-

but each member has their own upcoming goals - so after a brief discussion, it was noses to the grindstone and hard training time. A specialized triangle (sankaku) session

followed by some very tough sparring. Eddie Cummings, Gordon Ryan, Nicky Ryan, Matthew Tesla, Frankie Rosenthal, Ottavia Bourdain and Jake Shields show the wear of

a hard session with top competitors while I sit there and pretend I was part of it ♪

♪ I am always fascinated by the contrast between the the big shows and the humble and tough conditions that make success in the big shows possible. The big shows may be the FACE of the sport - BUT THE TRAINING ROOM IS THE SOUL OF THE SPORT. In thousands of small, obscure gyms across the globe are tens of thousands of dreams and ambitions - from those origins a few will emerge with the skills

and attributes to make their dreams become real

Reflections on my students - the birth of the wolverine:

Most great deeds have inauspicious beginnings. When Eddie Cummings first entered my morning class I saw him as a squirmy fellow armed with nothing more than a mediocre high elbow guillotine. One morning I came in and my regular Uke (demonstration partner) was absent. I chose Mr Cummings as a replacement and he proved very good. Afterwards he asked intelligent questions and we talked. I learned he was a graduate student in physics - a problem solver. As weeks and months passed I noted how he never missed classes and was rapidly learning. He expressed interest in more leg lock material. I started showing him more details of my approach to lower body submissions. Then he and Ottavia Bourdain decided to take leg lock study to a new level and do private classes every day - almost always in leg locks. An interesting part of this period is that Mr Cummings was initially VERY set against the outside ashi garami position that is one of the signature moves of our leg lock system and for which he would become famous! He thought it was totally wrong headed and would never work! I still tease him about that to this day! 'T' 'T' In time I managed to convince him of its effectiveness and he made incredible progress in application skills and theoretical understanding. As he began competing he quickly accumulated a vast number of submission wins, usually via leg lock. His defining moment in those early days however, a series of matches never recorded. Mr Cummings was invited by a friend of a friend to compete in an underground open weight grappling event in the basement of a gym somewhere in Brooklyn where he was obviously the smallest competitor. That night he fought around twelve men, winning everything by submission - fighting on a tiny mat on a grimy concrete floor in front of a crowd of maniacs gambling on the outcomes. As the smallest and nerdiest competitor, everyone bet against him. When he won, he was offered the princely sum of twenty rumpled one dollar bills! When people today see Mr Cummings

win big events like EBI and take \$20,000, they don't realize that it all began with crazy bouts for less than \$2 a match

Reflections on my students - The master of distance - Georges St-Pierre:

More than any other athlete I worked with, Georges St-Pierre was a master of the subtleties of controlling and exploiting the distance between himself and his opponent. This mastery of distance management is an absolutely critical part of MMA. In the vast majority of professional fights, more time is spent in this part of the game than any other. When people talk about the development of Mr St-Pierre's game, they often make reference to his many coaches and the influence these people had on him. Interestingly, the whole skill of distance control and covering distance to the takedown, WAS A SKILL THAT MR ST-PIERRE MOSTLY TAUGHT HIMSELF. As a teenager under the sometimes unorthodox tutelage of Kristof Midoux, Mr St-Pierre was constantly put in sparring situations where he had to box his way to a takedown on much older, more experienced opponents. As time passed, trial and error, experimentation and eclecticism in drawing in disparate skills from various combat arts produced an uncanny ability to strike into takedowns. Sometimes during fight camp after dinner or during some free time Mr St-Pierre will ask me to take a fighting stance and he will practice his repertoire of feints, deceptions and misdirections that enable him to get to his opponents legs for the takedown. I have done this with him for well over a decade. Yet to this day, he invariably misdirects me and easily gets to my legs - leaving me feeling like a fool as once again I am deceived by the same tricks ♪ ♪ Thus was born this great athletes best

weapon - he had many influences - but his primary weapon, the one which more than any other was the source of his success, was his own invention. It was a peculiar blend of his early days in sport karate, his wrestling training, fencing tactics and most of all, his adaptation to the demands of takedown sparring in his early years. Here he works with MMA standout David Branch on the theory of distance, both men are about to return to the UFC later in the year where once again they will be able to show the importance of this critical skill

Varying intensity:

Sometimes people hear about the frequency with which my students train and ask how they are not over trained to the point of injury and breakdown. The reason is because we know how to vary the intensity of workouts according to the context in which the workout is performed. If every workout is at maximum intensity, the injury and burn out rate would be unacceptably high. Intensity must be varied as part of a program leading to a specific goal, rather than as a constant hammering towards a general idea of getting better at jiu jitsu. Typically, if there is going to be a very tough morning workout, it will be followed by a relatively soft evening workout. This ability to SEE TODAY'S WORKOUT IN THE CONTEXT OF A WEEK'S WORK TOWARDS A GIVEN GOAL AND SCALE IT UP OR DOWN DEPENDING ON THAT CONTEXT IS A HUGE PART OF DEVELOPING THE LONGEVITY NEEDED TO MASTER THE COMPLEX SKILLS OF THE SPORT OVER TIME. Last night was a perfect example. I went to Long Island to join Chris Weidman and his two primary trainers, Ray Longo and Matt Serra for some fine tuning of grapple boxing skills (the interface of striking and grappling skills on the ground in MMA) in preparation for Mr Weidman's bout against the very tough and talented Gegard Mousasi at UFC 210. Mr Weidman had already had a

very tough sparring workout earlier in the day and has only a week left in another very tough training camp. Thus the second workout consisted of light technical and tactical drills - perfect for a second workout that will improve performance without causing physical problems for the athlete. It was a pleasure to see once again the incredible grace and power of this great middleweight as he whipped through the drills with the same vigor and skill I saw so many times in his lead up to winning the middleweight title. I demand that my athletes workout every day - but I do not demand they workout HARD every day. Learning to pace your workouts over time, scaling back when necessary, is the key to long term development that can garner great results over time.

Three the hard way:

The full squad is back in action in truly great competition action against three of the best grapplers in the world in the near future. Gordon Ryan starts it off with a very tough match up against IBJJF no gi world champion Lucas "Hulk" Barbosa for the 205 pound title at Fight to Win Pro 30 in New Jersey on April 8th. Mr Ryan's last matches were at his actual weight - 170 pounds welterweight, but he wants to test himself as he so often does, against the big men at light heavyweight. Mr Barbossa recently won gold at Five Grappling Super League, surpassing great world champions like Leandro Lo and Tarsis Humpreys with a mix of great technique and crushing physical power that showed why even the strongest men in the sport call him "hulk." Then Eddie Cummings returns to action in a truly fascinating battle against one of the best leg lockers in IBJJF competition - three time world no gi champion, Samir Chantre, a brilliant tactician on the mats in Philadelphia on April 15. After this Garry Tonon will take on the great MMA grappler Shinya Aoki at ONE Championship: Dynasty of Heroes in Singapore on May 26. Mr Aoki is a truly brilliant grappler with an amazing competition record in MMA He is a master of entering submissions from standing, often with spectacular flying variations. This will be a great match between two of the most

dynamic grapplers on the planet. I am always excited to see my students compete, but

now more so than ever. The reason is because all three senpai (senior students) are really starting to develop their own unique technical innovations that go beyond my teachings and into an independent and very exciting repertoire of moves and tactics that

is thrilling for me as a coach to observe. I am certain 2017 will be a year where these

young men rise to a new level of development. Though my body is currently having some issue and problems, my mind has never been so excited by these technical developments that these three outstanding technicians of the science of control and submission are developing. I have been watching in the gym - soon the world will watch

on stage against three truly impressive opponents!

Morning class:

Nothing wakes a person up faster than a man highly skilled in the arts of strangulation and joint breaking doing his best to do exactly that to you. The troops at

RGA NYC go at it in sparring rounds (randori) while the rest of the big apple slowly wakes up outside. Georges St-Pierre works elements of back attack and ashi garami systems with Eddie Cummings and Garry Tonon in some hard fought rounds as the action unfolds across the room. The unifying factor across the room - performance improvement in the kingly art. Some are professional athletes with specific upcoming

goals, others are amateurs with a more general goal of skill enhancement- but the path

forward is the same for both - increasing knowledge and embedding that knowledge in a

set of physical skills that can bring you closer to those goals.

Interpretations:

Here is an old photograph probably taken around 2000 at Renzo

Gracie's old academy. It is a good representation of one of the central features of jiu jitsu - multiplicity of views. Mr Gracie, myself and three of his most distinguished black

belts, Matt Serra, Shawn Williams and Robert Constance are watching action unfold in front of us. There are five pairs of eyes watching one event. You can be quite sure that each of us is seeing a very different picture from the man next to him. Sensei is probably seeing an incredibly quick and efficient entry into an arm in guillotine, Mr Serra is probably scheming a way to clear the arm and take a high elbow guillotine. Mr Williams is probably looking at a means of sitting back to closed guard and trapping an arm in a way that sets up many of his favorite attacks and Mr Constance is probably seeing the opportunity for a turn over into a pulverizing pin. I am probably looking for an entrance to either legs or back. One event - five interpretations. All of them were very effective. Everyone agrees that there are many incorrect ways to move and act in jiu jitsu - BUT DO NOT EXTRAPOLATE FROM THIS THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY. On the contrary, for almost any given scenario in the sport, there are a multitude of effective methods. Which one you choose is largely determined by your personality and body type, though sometimes your teaching history can be a factor also. One of the great privileges of training under Mr Gracie was the freedom he gave us in choosing our styles - that is why you see so much variation among his students. Use effectiveness in sparring and competition as your primary guide. As you grow in experience you will be able to feel and ultimately just look at a move and make good assessments as to its mechanical and tactical value. Until then, if it works well in sparring against good people, that's a solid sign that you are on the right track. Variation is a leading source of progress in jiu jitsu. Sometimes it may lead you temporarily astray, but don't worry, recovery is simple and progress will begin anew.

PS Thank you to all my Facebook friends with their kind birthday wishes. I hope this next year, despite my current troubles, I can help my students push forward to their goals - they are making incredible gains as we speak, and by so doing, inspire you all to reach yours. Thank you all, John Danaher

Details vs General movement:

Very often I get students come to me asking for details of a given move - the more details I give, the happier they get. This is a natural and good thing. However, I strongly believe that fixation on details can have detrimental effects in some instances. The moves of jiu jitsu are not all the same in overall character. Some of the moves are very STATIC in nature i.e. There is relatively little movement. For example, rear mount is a relatively static position, most of the control and finishes from here are small movements. In cases of static positions, details are paramount and very useful. Other moves/scenarios are much more DYNAMIC with large and fast movements. For example, a drop seoi nage throw. In the case of very dynamic movements, details are still very important, BUT THE STUDENT MUST FIRST LEARN THE GENERAL DYNAMIC MOVEMENT BEFORE THE DETAILS IF HE OR SHE IS TO BE ABLE TO USE IT EFFECTIVELY AGAINST RESISTANCE - THE DETAILS WILL COME LATER. Wherever the overall quality of the movement is just as important as the details for success- BEGIN WITH THE OVERALL MOVEMENT AS IT WILL BE USED IN SPARRING AND COMPETITION- you can always go back to details later. If you begin the details, students will have a lot of theoretical knowledge but lack the movement skills to actually apply it. Here I am coaching ten year old squad prodigy Mikey Wilson details of our back attack system. Due to the fact that this is mostly a static position, the emphasis is on small details of placement and positioning and tactics.

Reflections on my students - Gordon Ryan - stages of skepticism and learning:

In the early days of the squad, Eddie Cummings and Garry Tonon would come in every day to

train and compete almost every weekend. Mr Tonon told me about a talented teenage student he had named Gordon Ryan. He said he would try to bring Mr Ryan in to begin training with us. Sure enough, a few days later, a tall young man, jumped out on to the mats in the morning class and introduced himself. Mr Tonon immediately announced to myself and Mr Cummings, whilst we were going over some ashi garami movements, that Mr Ryan was deeply skeptical about the value of leg locks and fully believed all leg locks were a useless waste of time and simply did not work on him. Mr Ryan smiled confidently and announced he had never been leg locked by anyone and did not consider them a threat. Of course when drilling was over, a rather offended Mr Cummings immediately went to spar with Mr Ryan and proceeded to leg lock him from one side of the academy to the other! At the end of the class, a rather chastened Mr Ryan agreed that leg locks did indeed work and he would begin studying them immediately. Over the next few months he had great success at entering into leg locks, but struggled to actually finish them. As time passed, a new form of skepticism emerged in Mr Ryan - he came to believe that leg locks worked for other people, but not for him! I immediately showed him some variations in grip that greatly tightened his locks and immediately he started getting good results. A few days later, Mr Cummings returned from a short journey and asked to roll with Mr Ryan. In a stunning reversal, Mr Ryan successfully applied two beautiful heel hooks in one round of sparring- shocking both Mr Cummings and himself. For the first time he came to believe not only that heel hooks work, but that they could work for him against the best in the business. In my experience, THE STRONGEST BELIEFS WE HOLD ARE THOSE WHERE WE BEGAN WITH TOTAL SKEPTICISM BUT WERE PROVEN WRONG IN SOME MEMORABLE AND TANGIBLE WAY UNTIL WE BECAME BELIEVERS DESPITE OURSELVES . THOSE are the beliefs we will rely upon in the stress and fear of competition

Overcoming limitations:

With some recent problems with my left knee, even demonstrating jiu jitsu is problematic for me now. Last night I taught a seminar at the dojo of my good friend and teammate, Carl Massaro. Through the capable help of our mutual student, Frank Rosenthal, we were able to give a good representation of our squads ashi garami game. It was very pleasing to see the room quickly pick up the main concepts and techniques and begin applying them. It gives me confidence that whatever happens in the future, I can still be of use to my beloved students and the sport. It amazed me to see relative beginners to the leg locking game quickly slipping into position and applying the locks correctly despite my current inability to show them physically myself. Thanks to Carl Massaro and his students for a lovely night of training and learning in New Jersey .

Exciting days ahead:

Great week of training with the squad. Gordon Ryan has been peaking well for his superfight against world no gi champion Lucas "Hulk"Barbosa this Saturday night in New Jersey at Fight to Win pro 30. Once again Mr Ryan, a welterweight, will test himself against the big men at light heavy weight. Then April 15 in Philadelphia, the return of Eddie Cummings on his bout against three time world champion Shamir Chantre at Fight to Win Pro 31. I really believe Mr Cummings game has attained a new level of development and I am very excited to see him competing again. Across country in California, fifteen year old Nicky Ryan will battle at the American ADCC trials in an attempt to become the youngest person ever to qualify for the world championships. With him will be outstanding kohai student, Matthew Tesla as he attempts to qualify for ADCC at 170 pounds. Behind it all is Garry Tonon, working hard in preparation for his grappling superfight against Shinya Aoki in what will be one

of the highest paid, most watched and most anticipated grappling matches in history going down in Singapore on May 26. All great events, all great goals for the squad but as always we are all mindful of the fact that these lofty goals are only attainable by the most mundane means - hard, intelligently directed training in the dojo. The greatest goals are aspired to from the humblest and most everyday beginnings

8 April at 03:12 · Instagram ·

Gordon Ryan back in action tomorrow night: Tomorrow night at Fight To Win Pro 30,

Gordon Ryan will battle the brilliant and physically very powerful Brazilian grappler, Lucas "Hulk" Barbosa in New Jersey in a ten minute bout without points - if it goes the

distance a decision will be rendered based upon submissions and positional control. Mr

Ryan has been training exceedingly well. This matchup of two great grapplers should be thrilling!

8 April at 18:44 · Instagram ·

Meeting up with Senpai: When I was a beginner student under my Sensei Renzo

Gracie, our senpai (big brothers) where Ricardo Almeida, Matt Serra and Rodrigo Gracie. All three were world champions in there respective areas. All three were highly

successful in jiu jitsu and MMA. All three were amazing teachers who inspired us every

day we trained. Here I am in Sudbury, Canada teaching next to Mr Almeida at the NOMAD martial arts convention. It is magical to see the same looks of wonder on the faces of the students here as we had in NYC all those years ago . . . Here is he teaching a superb class on the essential principles of guard passing. I never forgot the power of role models in the classroom to bring out the best in the class overall. That is why I try so hard to create a group of outstanding students who I know will create a level of excitement and interest that will make the level of the ENTIRE ROOM rise.
9 April at 15:07 · Instagram ·

Another bout - another belt: Gordon Ryan won the 205 pound division belt at Fight to

Win 30 last night in a very tightly contested match against Lucas Barbosa last night New Jersey. It was not the decisive result that our team always strives for. Mr Barbosa fought with an intelligent tactical strategy of snatching at two submissions along with some late attempts to pass. Neither the pass or the submissions were close. Mr Ryan looked to engage from bottom. He came close to nice reversal from bottom. The judges appeared to conclude that this was the only move of the match that came close to completion and so scored it in Mr Ryan's favor. Any time a match is that close there will always be controversy as to the result- usually the opinions are split according to team affiliation, personal like or dislike or one's general beliefs about the nature of the sport. There are several things that I believe all side will agree on. First, the two athletes are very evenly matched. Second, the match would have been much more satisfying if it was twenty minutes long rather than ten. I know Mr Ryan would be very enthusiastic about a rematch. Perhaps it could be done as a first defense of the belt with 20 minutes

duration. Or if The organization is reluctant to opt for a longer match, at another venue without a belt. I felt that perhaps sacrificing just one of the many preliminary matches to create a longer main event would be a good idea. Well done to both athletes for a tight match. As always we are very proud of Mr Ryan's performance and his preparation. Here, Mr Ryan warms up for the event with Garry Tonon and Tom Deblasse. Now the squad will prepare for ADCC trials in California and fight to win 31 featuring Eddie Cummings vs the great Shamir Chantre next weekend in Philadelphia.

Teaching here - Teaching there:

Just wrapped up a weekend teaching to the fine folks of Sudbury, Canada along with my great friend and mentor, Ricardo Almeida. It was all organized by Renzo Gracie Ottawa stalwart, Pat Cooligan, who has done an incredible job of taking our Sensei's philosophy and techniques and introducing them across Ontario and beyond. Now I am racing through airports and back in NYC! A big week of training coming up starting first thing Monday morning as Eddie Cummings goes back on stage to take on three time world champion Samir Chantre next Saturday in Fight to Win Pro 31. Nicky Ryan goes west to California with teammates Matthew Tesla and Jason Rau, to attempt to become the youngest athlete ever (fifteen) to qualify for the world championships at the American ADCC trials. Then it's uptown to the Bronx academy to check out progress of the Bombers as they continue to impress me with their development. It's always a special feeling returning to NYC from travel - I have loved here 25 years and it's never lost it's charm, pace and excitement for me - but even that feeling pales compared with the excitement of returning to train the troops in the dojo as they work hard towards their dreams and aspirations.

Fighting the big men:

Some of the most impressive wins in the short history of the squad came in their many outings against bigger and stronger opponents in open weight divisions or super fights. There is no clearly sign of the worth of a training program in jiu jitsu than the production of athletes who can take on high level opponents

who have a big size and strength advantage and consistently win. In my experience THE TWO BEST MEANS TO SUCCESSFULLY ATTACK BIGGER, STRONGER OPPONENTS IS TO ATTACK THE LEGS AND BACK. Whilst I encourage my students to train to attack the whole body, these stand out in my opinion as best in allowing a

smaller athlete to take advantage of the innate weaknesses of the human body to a greater degree than any others. A very fine example of this attitude was on display when squad member, Garry Tonon took on heavyweight world champion Luiz Panza - a

man known for impressive physical strength which, in conjunction with good technique,

allows him to exert tremendous breaking pressure with Achilles lock variations. The clash took place under IBJJF rules at the no gi world championships, so heel hooks, one of our signature moves, were illegal. Mr Tonon immediately went into a battle for

the feet, taking on Mr Panza at his speciality- the Achilles lock. A deadlock occurred, so

Mr Tonon slipped behind his bigger opponent and took the back. Once there, he was able to take advantage of the fact that the human body is well adapted to deal with threats from the front, but much less so to deal with threats from the rear. Very quickly

he was able to slip in a well applied stranglehold and take a fine victory. This was an important match for Mr Tonon's development. He had always been a good scrambler to

the back, but learning to UNIFY weapons - leg attacks and back attacks - greatly increases their effectiveness. REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT THE HUMAN BODY IS FULL OF ASYMMETRIES - AS SUCH SOME AREAS WILL BE WEAKER OR MORE VULNERABLE THAN OTHERS. If you wish to defeat a stronger opponent, knowledge of these asymmetrical elements and how they relate to the techniques and tactics of the

sport is the key to success.

Active patience vs passive patience:

Beginning students are often told to be patient in the sport of jiu jitsu - it takes time to be successful. There is obviously a large measure

of truth to this. Nonetheless, when I coach I emphasize the difference between what I

term ACTIVE PATIENCE vs PASSIVE PATIENCE. It is absolutely true that the skills of any complex activity take time to develop. Skills are born in the same state we are - weak, vulnerable and unlikely to survive without nurture and outside help. In time they

develop strength and maturity. Just as a weak and helpless baby can one day grow into

an Achilles or Hector; so to, SKILLS THAT ARE WEAK, FEEBLE AND UNPROMISING TODAY, CAN, OVER TIME AND TRAINING, MATURE INTO UNSTOPPABLE

TOKUI-WAZA (favorite moves) THAT CAN WIN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS. We must be careful however, to avoid thinking that since time is required to develop skill, then we

should simply sit back and let time run and watch our skills accumulate. This PASSIVE

approach to patience is the enemy of progress. It is essentially a form of lazy complacency where one assumes that by simply showing up and going through the same routines, progress will be made.

Patience itself is not a virtue - ACTIVE

PATIENCE - the notion of actively working towards well defined goals with a specific plan whilst recognizing that time will be required to get those goals, is the virtue athletes

need. Active patience is the acceptance that skills take time to develop, combined with

the recognition that those skills won't develop themselves. They will only grow through

intelligent planning towards a specific goal. Garry Tonon is an excellent example. When

he first began studying with me, he had no effective strangles from in front of his opponent. I immediately set him to work on developing a strong high elbow guillotine.

For months he struggled. At the six month mark he despaired of ever having a strong

guillotine. Then finally he started having breakthroughs in the gym against lower belts.

Soon it became a trusted weapon. He used it brilliantly on the big stage against the

much larger and stronger Kit Dale to win a match that gained him widespread attention.